THE VOLITIONAL THEORY OF ACTION

A CRITICAL EXAMINATION

OF

THE VOLITIONAL THEORY OF ACTION

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ABSTRACT

The volitional theory of action has recently been assailed as an outmoded account of human action, while attempts have been made to preserve the theory on grounds which side-step the traditional difficulties. Both approaches to the theory have left it without a coherent expression. This thesis is an attempt to give a coherent theoretical foundation to the theory and to effect its critical evaluation.

Preceding a discussion of the theory is a historical appreciation of its tradition, and this is used as a backdrop for viewing two aspects of the theory which serve today as its paradigms. The one is an analysis of human action in terms of a volition which is considered as something which an agent performs, and the other is an analysis of human action in terms of a volition connected causally to an item of behavior. The incompatibility of these aspects is indicated, and an attempt is made to locate them within a wider theoretical structure. This is done by distinguishing between atomic actions and instrumental actions and by attributing to the theory two definitions of an individual human action which preserve these paradigms and which account for both sorts of actions.

The final segment of the thesis is concerned with a critical dismissal of the theory. The stock arguments against the theory are first defeated, and it is then argued that one aspect of the theory fails to account for forbearances and that the other aspect does not provide an adequate account of atomic actions.

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It should be noted that I alone am responsible for any errors remaining in the thesis itself.

C O N T E N T S

I

INTRODUCTION

There need be nothing mysterious about human action as such. Persons initiate and accomplish certain deeds--in other words, persons do or perform actions. Most would endorse this fact, and few would contest it; and if the testimony of both common sense and personal experience is any guide, then we may certainly consider human action to be a datum beyond reasonable doubt and skeptical dissension. What has seemed to many philosophers to be wholly mysterious, however, is the unique relation obtaining between a person and his actions. Added to this is the mystery of how "action" is to be analyzed into its constituent elements in the philosophical endeavor to acquire a clear understanding of the nature, the rudiments, and the theoretical groundwork of human action.

We seek, of course, to uncover the philosophical roots of human action because we want a firm foundation for drawing the boundaries around those actions for which we, as agents, can claim responsibility. We contrast the voluntary with the involuntary and actions with mere bodily movements, and we thus want persuasive reasons for doing so. We also want specifically to preserve human freedom, and such freedom is insisted on mainly because we want to distinguish those actions which are subject to moral and legal appraisal and those which are not. If, as ethical theorists, we seek grounds for the justification of actions, then, since a notion of action is presupposed, we need a satisfactory answer to the question of what an action is.

An action is something which an agent does; actions, in other words, are "doings" of a certain sort. Initially at least this much is certain when we treat action as a non-primitive concept. This leaves us, of course, with the important task of explicating the relational notion of "doing". But we are also left with one other element. Actions are the products of an agent's doing them, since in doing or performing them the agent brings them into existence, and thus actions are either the products of a direct doing (there is nothing else an agent needs to do in order to accomplish it) or the products of an indirect doing and are thereby mediated in some way. What is further required is a more developed analysis of what an action is--an analysis in which the notion of a direct or indirect relation of doing is explored and rendered perspicuous.

The volitional theory of action, the theory with which we shall here be concerned, is a historically renowned attempt to provide such an analysis and, moreover, to establish a theoretical groundwork of human action in terms of certain behavior linked fundamentally to "volitions". Although its philosophical career, which extends from its genesis in Latin philosophy into the present, has been long, it remains a classical contribution to the central issues in what is today referred to as the philosophy of action. One of the points of departure the volitional theory takes is the view that peculiarly human actions are to be analyzed into an indirect relation obtaining between a person and his behavior. Consider, for example, Wittgenstein's recently popular quotation: "Let us not forget this: when 'I raise my arm', my arm goes up. And the problem arises: what is left over if I

subtract the fact that my arm goes up from the fact that I raise my arm?"[1] If the question of what is left over is accepted as legitimate, then the problem which remains is, so to speak, to fill in the blank. Certain volitional theorists complete the required "sum", endeavoring thereby to provide a necessary condition for all human action, by adding another fact--the occurrence of an "act of will" or simply a "volition". A bodily movement plus an existentially prior act of will equals an action. In this particular view, then, an action is a successful "willing", and to act is thus to will successfully. In other words, what makes a distinct bodily movement an action is the occurrence of an antecedent volition, which is a necessary condition for all human actions and which, in some sense, produces the subsequent physical movement.

It is now frequently claimed that the notion of acts of will or volitions embodies a strange philosophical theory of the nature of man and is, at the same time, a dogma. This may well be true, but it is difficult to single out a clear form of this so-called dogma; and this difficulty stems principally from the historical fact that the words 'will' and 'volition'[2] have had many uses and have found their

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[1] Philosophical Investigations (New York: Macmillan, 1968), par. 621. Wittgenstein's question, it must be granted, has been very overworked in the recent literature on human action. One philosopher, possibly following Wittgenstein himself, considers the question a dubious snare and argues for its rejection. See Robert A. Jaeger, "Action and Subtraction", Philosophical Review, 82 (1973), pp. 320-29.

[2] I use single quotation marks to indicate that I am mentioning, and saying something about, a linguistic expression as such (whether a word, a phrase, or a sentence). I use double quotation marks for the other purposes for which quotation marks are customarily employed.

home, often deeply entrenched, in a spate of philosophical contexts.[3] Although it is not immediately evident that actions are performed by an agent's "willing" them, or that human actions uniquely embody acts of will or volitions, it must be granted that the words 'will' and 'volition' have a legitimate place in our language and in our linguistic tradition. We do speak of a person's doing something "willfully" or with "strength of will"; persons are often said to be "weak-willed", as opposed to "strong-willed", and to do things "of their own free will" and "by their own volition". These are familiar enough concepts, for we know how to use them and we understand others when they use them. So the concept of volition need not be a very interesting problem on the level of every day affairs and ordinary language. It becomes a problem when we delve deeply into the facts surrounding human action and thereby endeavor to unmask the truth. For whether acts of will or volitions must play a role in the analysis of human action and whether they are indeed to be included in the repertoire of the human being are questions the answers to which ultimately involve the resolution of certain enigmas of actions construed as products of volitions. The first step toward such a resolution, though, is a clear understanding of what is under discussion.

Any questions concerning acts of will cannot be purely an empirical matter. This is so because the will--at least traditionally--does

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[3] Such diversity certainly renders a core-meaning of these terms much less perspicuous than, say, an elusive concept with several facets. See Vernon J. Bourke, Will in Western Thought (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964), esp. p. 235, for an attempt to construct a helpful definition of the word 'will'.

not have the usual features of an empirical datum: it is not something which can be identified and characterized through sense experience. There are of course philosophers who claim to have discovered such things by introspecting and observing their activities during their daily affairs and in their private behavior. But there are others who equally maintain that there are no phenomenological grounds for assuming that all actions comprise acts of will or volitions, assuring their opponents that they can find no such principle within themselves. This "search" is further made complicated (or perhaps made easier) by the fact that 'will' and 'volition' have sometimes been employed as blanket terms for such notions as decisions, choices, and reasons.[4]

If the status of volitions is not clearly an empirical matter, and if the existence of the will, whether it be an entity or power or faculty or principle, and the acts thereof is phenomenologically in question, then the only recourse is to enlightened discussion. For surely it is easier to delineate the essential features of something once one is certain about what is to be thus characterized. Our first task is therefore to give some account of what I refer to as the volitional theory of action, the natural home of the concepts of will and volition, since it is there that the role of a volition is defended and most clearly defined.

My account of the theory is given in two stages. In the first stage, which concerns the next chapter, I survey representative theories

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[4] See, for example, Carl Ginet, "Can the Will be Caused?", Phil. Review, 71 (1962), pp. 340-51.

of action in order to appreciate more fully the historical background of the volitional theory from its inchoate formation to its developed standing in contemporary philosophy of action. The elements involved are many, for the volitional theory is a complex theory which embraces several philosophical issues and which is linked to a variety of philosophical doctrines. In order to see this, we need only to look to the history of philosophy for the evidence. After doing so, we can then--in the second stage--draw the boundaries around this unique theory by stating what definitions of human action it provides. I proceed in this way mainly because I want to place the volitional theory in the best possible light, and this task is expedited by an adequate account of the theory itself. It should be noted here that I neither confine the discussion to the contexts in which volitions have a place nor advance arguments for the philosophical doctrines mentioned; my central concern is with the theory of action which incorporates "volitions" as fundamental ingredients in an analysis of an individual human action. It is in the third chapter that I concern myself with this attempt to give a theoretical rendering of the volitional theory, and I shall do this (i) by giving some foundation for what I refer to as <u>atomic actions</u>, <u>instrumental actions</u>, and <u>molecular actions</u>, also discussing briefly the topic of forbearances, and (ii) by presenting two analyses of human action which emerge from the general discussion of the volitional theory. I shall consider these analyses to be the defining boundaries of the volitional theory. Since I am not propounding a theory of volition, I do not attempt to define 'volition', 'act of will', or 'will'; a technical sense of 'volition'

will emerge from our discussion of the theory in the third chapter.

My explication of the volitional theory is inevitably a means to a specific end, that end being a critical examination of the theory itself. This examination is confined to the last chapter; and here I shall also proceed in two stages. In the first stage, I present and deflect the stock arguments against the theory, discussing also a modification to be made of the philosophical status of "volitions". The second stage of my examination constitutes a final adjudication of the volitional theory, and my argument will be that the volitional theory, as I present it, does not provide us with an adequate theory of action.

II

HISTORICAL ROOTS

The perennial issue of "free will", still much debated in moral and legal circles, usually involves an attempt to account somehow for human freedom and responsibility, which we commonsensically assume to be facts, and to provide some groundwork for excuses and deserts. But what place the "will" has in these matters is not at all evident. The ancient Greeks, who certainly concerned themselves with freedom and responsibility, managed to discuss these topics without having a concept of will at all.

Although St. Augustine is usually given credit for introducing the concept of will into philosophy, this view, notwithstanding his contributions to ecumenical philosophy, is only partly correct. The early Latin concept of voluntas, the etymological parent of our words 'will' and 'volition', was already in common use at a time when the the Roman philosophers--including Augustine--speculated with much that their Greek forbears had bequeathed them. The word 'voluntas', which ordinarily meant "good will", "favor", or a "will" or "testament",[5] had a variety of contexts in which it might be employed. One of these was the issue of free will, and this was often framed by even the earliest Latin philosophers in terms of 'voluntas'. Augustine's 'voluntas' (bona voluntas) closely resembles the "reasonable desire" of the Stoic

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[5] Neal W. Gilbert, "The Concept of the Will in Early Latin Philosophy", Journal of the History of Philosophy, 1 (1963), pp. 17-35.

sage, which Cicero rendered into Latin as 'voluntas', without any adjective.[6] What Augustine can be given credit for is his introducing the concept of the "evil" will into philosophy, which broadened the lines of analysis considerably and helped to set the stage--at least in the Latin--for a technical sense of the concept of will.

But we need not trace the actual development of the concepts of will and volition; indeed, the hereditary lines are long and intricate, and such an analysis, if even partly exhaustive, would require a volume in itself. The immediate task is to consider the philosophical contexts which help to form the backdrop of the volitional theory of action. This, I am sure, will provide some historical background for viewing the volitional theory itself; and viewing the historical roots of this theory will aid us in discerning its essential ingredients.

1. The Epicurean Problem

Since an important feature of all human actions is that each may be a candidate for moral and legal appraisal, a crucial difficulty thus arises for any philosophical system proposing criteria which exempt all actions from blame and which thus exempt them from praise. The Epicurean system faced just this difficulty. For the ontological inventory of this system was limited to physical atoms and their various arrangements, the void, and one type of interaction among the physical constituents: the collision of atoms with each other. Each person, it was held, is born with a soul of a particular character,

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[6] Ibid., p. 18.

which is determined by the proportion of atoms constituting a human soul. Since his system held that the laws of nature govern all things --atoms and their configurations--once the world is formed, Epicurus had to demonstrate somehow that morality was not meaningless within his system. In other words, some place within the system had to be provided for human freedom and responsibility. If all events are the result of a causal interaction among atoms, as the Epicureans maintained, then there would seem to be no means of placing responsibility for an event along the unbroken and wholly determined causal sequence.

Yet the system of Epicurus was not a completely determined system, for some discontinuity in the causal sequence was made possible by his alleged doctrine of the atomic swerve. The source of this indeterminacy is the occasional "swerve" (parenklisis in Greek; clinamen in Latin) of an atom or atoms, which was said to occur at no predictable time or place. There is no mention of the swerve in the extant fragments of Epicurus' works, however, and we must rely on the account Lucretius gives of it in De Rerum Natura,[7] where he accords the swerve at least two principal roles.

The first function of the swerve is cosmological. The atoms, which fall downwards at a uniform speed through the void, have two inherent causes of movement: the natural weight of the individual atoms and the impact of atom against atom. A third cause of movement --the swerve--was necessary to account for the "first-beginnings" of

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[7] Cyril Bailey, trans. (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), II. 216-93, pp. 247-51.

things, which originate through the collision of atoms. Without this deviation from the downward falling of the atoms, then, "all things would fall downwards through the deep void like drops of rain, nor could collision come to be, nor a blow brought to pass for the first-beginnings: so nature would never have brought ought to being".[8]

The second function of the swerve, and the one that interests us here, is the core of the so-called Epicurean "theory of free will". It is in this context that Lucretius gives two separate analyses of voluntary action. The first involves the atomic swerve, and it is employed specifically in order to save the "will"--voluntas--from an endless succession of causes which can be traced beyond the agent's birth. Without it there would be no explanation for the "free will" (libera voluntas) which living things possess and which allows the "decrees of fate" to be broken.[9] In voluntary action, Lucretius tells us, the agent's will initiates movement, which is directed throughout the bodily members,[10] for "a start of movement is brought to pass from the heart, and comes forth first of all from the will of the mind, and then afterwards is spread through all the body and limbs".[11] This is then contrasted with being struck and constrained by another. The agent is still held to be capable of resisting external compulsion and

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[8] Ibid., II. 221-24, pp. 247-49.

[9] Ibid., II. 251-60, pp. 249-51.

[10] Ibid., II. 261-62, p. 251. "For without doubt it is his own will which gives to each man a start for this movement, and from the will the motions pass flooding through the limbs."

[11] Ibid., II. 269-71, p. 251.

of initiating movement.[12] In this way, Lucretius argues, the atoms (or "seeds") must also contain another cause of movement besides the collision of atoms (the "blows") and their weight, which offers resistance to the impact of other atoms. This third cause of movement, the atomic swerve, serves here to salvage the mind (mens) from an inner necessity:

> But that the very mind feels not some necessity within in doing all things, and is not constrained like a conquered thing to bear and suffer, this is brought about by the tiny swerve of the first-beginnings in no determined direction of place and at no determined time.[13]

Thus all that is required to save the mind's will from a succession of causes, and thus from the constraint of an inner necessity, is some discontinuity brought about by an indeterminate atomic swerve. But Lucretius nowhere attempts to equate the swerve with each act of voluntas, as some commentators have suggested,[14] which would construe all voluntary actions as chance events of some sort; and the exact positive role of the atomic swerve, as it occurs in voluntary action, remains obscure.

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[12] Ibid., II. 277-83, p. 251. "Do you not therefore now see that, albeit a force outside pushes many men and constrains them often to go forward against their will and to be hurried away headlong, yet there is something in our breast, which can fight against it and withstand it? And at its bidding too the store of matter is constrained now and then to turn throughout the limbs and members, and, when pushed forward, is reined back and comes to rest again."

[13] Ibid., II. 289-93, p. 251.

[14] See David J. Furley, Two Studies in the Greek Atomists (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967), Study II, pp. 161-237. Furley gives a substantial discussion of this suggestion and finds it not only problematic but far from helpful in understanding Lucretius'

Yet Lucretius gives us another analysis of voluntary action --the example used is that of walking--and this, although compatible with the first analysis, does not employ the atomic swerve at all:

> Next, how it comes to pass that we are able to plant our steps forward, when we wish ... I say that first of all idols of walking fall upon our mind, and strike the mind.... Then comes the will; for indeed no one begins to do anything, ere the mind has seen beforehand what it will do, and what it foresees, of that there is an image. And so, when the mind stirs itself so that it wishes to start and step forward, it straightway strikes the force of soul which is spread abroad in the whole body throughout limbs and frame. And that is easy to do, since it is held in union with it. Then the soul goes on and strikes the body, and so little by little the whole mass is thrust forward and set in movement.[15]

Composed of a proportion of three or four kinds of atoms, the human soul reacts to the external world via images (the "idols": simulacra), a pattern of atoms in motion, which flow from all external objects and which reach the soul through the sense organs and the mind. In discussing how, among the various images retained in perception, the mind is able to think of certain ones,[16] Lucretius explains that the mind only notices what it attends to, which is like focusing the eyes.[17]

In voluntary action, then, "when the mind stirs itself so that it wishes to start and step forward", the mental image of the movement to be accomplished--walking--and voluntas combine to initiate a causal

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account of the swerve. He argues that the function of the swerve is purely negative--to combat the view that the Epicurean system is rigidly deterministic--and he finds no evidence for the contention that all voluntary actions would incorporate an atomic swerve.

[15] De Rerum, IV. 877-91, pp. 407-9.

[16] Ibid., IV. 779-83, p. 403.

[17] Ibid., IV. 802-10, p. 405.

sequence which culminates in the bodily movement of walking. Lucretius does not further explain his use of 'voluntas', however, and his theory of action remains undeveloped. To construe Lucretius' analysis of action as a volitional theory would of course go far beyond his actual account; he does not attempt to distinguish voluntas from mens, and no mention is made of acts of a separate will or volitions. Yet it is at least clear that "will" is made a prime ingredient in initiating bodily movements, and this is a feature which Lucretius' account has in common with, as we shall see, the volitional theory.

2. The Will as the Source and Locus of Freedom

One broad philosophical perspective endeavors to place the locus of human freedom in the will of the person. For in this view any act or operation of a person's will is to be characterized in terms of a radical freedom; an instance of "willing", this view maintains, is eo ipso an exercising of the extreme freedom possessed by man in virtue of his will. Historically this is an important viewpoint in even the broadest terms, and it has found some of its staunchest defenders among the Christian philosophers of the medieval era. It is in this context that we shall briefly consider the positions of St. Augustine, John Duns Scotus, and Rene Descartes.

Augustine gives us an early development of this view in De libero arbitrio voluntatis,[18] where, in discussing personal freedom

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[18] Translated by Anna S. Benjamin and L. H. Hackstaff as On Free Choice of the Will (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1964). References will be to this translation.

within the context of the problem of evil, he gives the issue of the will a central place in his theodicy. For here Augustine argues that all moral and physical evil is made possible by the will's "free choice" to turn from the ends for which it was created--a certain spectrum of goods--and toward which a person's will, if it is to be a "good will" is directed. Augustine defines 'good will' as "the will by which we seek to live honestly and uprightly and to arrive at wisdom".[19] An "evil will" (mala voluntas) is one which, through its free choice or free determination, turns from eternal and higher goods to temporal and inferior goods.[20] Augustine considers the freedom of the will itself to be an intermediate good.[21] Although voluntary, this unique movement of the will is said to be a defective movement, for a person's will is by its nature directed toward certain immutable goods;[22] and it is in this sense that evil is a corruption (or a privation) of an original goodness.[23]

It is thus through free will that man may do either good or evil. For the very possibility of committing evil through free choice of will also makes possible the doing of good deeds; and without free

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[19] Ibid., I. xiii. 83, p. 24.

[20] Ibid., II. xix. 198-200, pp. 82-3.

[21] Ibid., II. xix, pp. 80-3.

[22] Ibid., III. i. 9-10, p. 87.

[23] Ibid., III. vii. 70-5, pp. 102-4. Since all things are considered good qua existent, it is in their manner of existing (e.g., temporally) that constitutes their inferior goodness and thus their evil.

choice of will, Augustine tells us, there would be neither good nor evil.[24] Moreover, the movement of the will toward transitory and inferior goods is not a natural movement, as a stone's movement is considered to be, and a sinful act is not made necessary by the nature of the will itself. If the movements of the will were either natural or necessary, Augustine argues, then such movements (and the resulting actions) could not be held blameworthy, nor correspondingly could they be held praiseworthy.[25] Since we do praise or blame the movements of the will, it is required that they be neither natural nor necessary but voluntary and thus in a person's power.[26]

Since the pivotal movement of the will (between a hierarchy of goods) is voluntary and thus in our power, it is therefore free. This is so because the will is something which is always in our power and whatever is in our power is free. Augustine argues this in a discussion with Evodius, his interlocutor, over the question of human freedom vis-à-vis God's foreknowledge of a person's actions.[27] Here he tells Evodius:

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[24] Ibid., II. i. 7, p. 36. See also II. xviii. 179, p. 78

[25] Ibid., III. i. 3-5, p. 86.

[26] Ibid., III. i. 8-11, p. 87.

[27] Ibid., III. ii-iv, p. 88-95. Augustine's answer is that although God foreknows a person's actions and the actions thus occur necessarily, they are nevertheless done freely; for our actions are subject to our will, and the will, being in our power, is free. See William L. Rowe, "Augustine on Foreknowledge and Free Will", Review of Metaphysics, 17 (1963-64), pp. 356-63, for a critical discussion of Augustine's arguments.

> How clearly the truth cries out from you! For you could not maintain that anything is in our power except actions that are subject to our own will. Therefore, nothing is so completely in our power as the will itself, for it is ready at hand to act immediately as soon as we will. Thus we are right in saying that we grow old by necessity, not by will; or that we die by necessity, not by will, and so on. Who but a madman would say that we do not will with the will?[28]
> .... When we will, if the will itself is lacking in us, we surely do not will. If it cannot happen that when we will we do not will, then the will is present in the one who wills. And nothing else is in our power except what is present to us when we will. Our will, therefore, is not a will unless it is indeed in our power. And since it is indeed in our power, it is free in us. What we do not, or cannot, have in our power is not free for us.[29]

Augustine is advocating not only a radical responsibility, since the immediate agent of our actions is the will, which is further subservient to our power over it, but also a radical freedom of the will. For the notion of the will's being "in our power" is to be explicated in terms of a free determination of the will to act or not to act. Our actions, being voluntary and thus in our power, are actions subject to our will; and the will, Augustine argues, has no other cause but itself:

> After all, what cause of the will could there be, except the will itself? It is either the will itself, and it is not possible to go back to the root of the will; or else it is not the will, and there is no sin. Either the will is the first cause of sin, or else there is no first cause. Sin cannot rightly be imputed to him unless he wills it.[30]

This apparently must be the case because, in Augustine's view, moral responsibility and appraisal would be done away with if the will were

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[28] Ibid., III. iii. 27-8, p. 92.

[29] Ibid., III. iii. 33-4, p. 93.

[30] Ibid., III. xvii. 168-69, p. 126.

not the sole cause of our actions or if the cause of the will's activities were something outside itself. What principles lie behind the will's capacity for causing or determining itself in such a way Augustine leaves unanswered. And this is an important omission since Augustine's notion of "free choice" (liberum arbitrium) is to be explicated in terms of the capability of the will to cause, or to determine, itself in human action.

Augustine, in this account, treats all human actions as voluntary actions, since such actions are those which are "willed" or which follow from the activity of a will. The actions of the will do belong to a person's "soul", however, and the human soul, in Augustinian psychology, can be construed either as mind (mens), memory (memoria), or will (voluntas): Augustine does not embrace a faculty psychology. In doing or acting, the entire soul is considered as voluntas.[31] Thus the will in man designates the soul as freely acting; and it is therefore the human soul qua will that freely causes or determines itself in initiating actions. Although a concept of volition could be accommodated in Augustine's analysis of the will, his account, as it stands, leaves such a notion undefined.

Duns Scotus maintains a similar but more developed position on the view that human actions are intrinsically free in virtue of the nature of the will, and it remains a distinguishing feature of his

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[31] See Augustine's The Trinity, X; esp. X. 11. 17-19. Hence his definition of 'will' as "a movement of the soul, under no compulsion, either toward not losing or acquiring something". The Retractions, Mary Inez Bogan, trans. (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1968), p. 66.

theory of action and his psychology that he grants the human will an extreme metaphysical freedom. Scotus follows the Scholastics in considering the soul to be the form of the body and its animating principle; he also follows them in according various powers or faculties to the human soul, two of which are the will and the intellect, which, for Scotus, are fundamental constituents in every voluntary action.[32]

In Scotus's view, a human action results from the appropriate act of a human agent's will; and this is so by virtue of the intimate relationship said to hold between the body, its activities, and the faculty of the soul which is proper to that activity. According to Scotus, though, a human action is always a "contingent action" or one whose opposite could occur at the very same time it actually did;[33] and at the very moment it actually occurs, it would have been possible for it not to occur.[34] The principle of contingent action is none other than the will, since, for Scotus, the will is the efficient cause of its own acts and since only the will causes something contingently.[35]

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[32] Scotus considers the "intellective soul" (the rational soul) to be the specific form of the human body. See Duns Scotus, Philosophical Writings, Alan Wolter, ed. and trans. (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1963), p. 137. Also, the soul is only formally distinct from its faculties--they differ, but it is logically impossible for them to be separated. On this point, see Julius Weinberg, A Short History of Medieval Philosophy (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1964), pp. 218 and 233.

[33] Phil. Writings, p. 55.

[34] Roy R. Effler, John Duns Scotus and the Principle 'Omne Quod Movetur Ab Alio Movetur" (New York: Franciscan Institute, 1962), p. 164.

[35] Phil. Writings, p. 54. See also Effler, p. 164.

What this expresses is a totally reflexive capability of the human agent to cause or not to cause an action, and to cause actions of contrary sorts; for, as Scotus claims, "man is master of his acts to such an extent that it is within his power to determine himself at will to this or to its opposite".[36]

As a principle of contingent action, the will is held to be the sole cause of its volitions--it actively determines itself in willing--and in this way it is a contingent cause of those actions which result from its self-activity;[37] in virtue of its nature as a contingent cause, the will is capable of willing the contrary of what it actually does will at the very moment it acts, and it is capable of not willing some action or other.[38] The actions of a human agent are thus held to be wholly free, being grounded in the reflexive capacity

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[36] Phil. Writings, p. 144.

[37] "I say, therefore, that nothing other than the will is the total cause of a volition in a (given) act of will. One reason, previously stated, is that something happens among things contingently. By contingently happening, I mean that the event does not occur inevitably. Otherwise, if everything should happen inevitably, it would not be possible to consider and take counsel together." Opus Oxoniense, II. d. 25, n. 22. Cited in J. R. Creswell, "Duns Scotus on the Will", Franciscan Studies, 13 (1953), p. 152. See also Phil. Writings, p. 54, and Effler, pp. 162-3.

[38] Scotus's view of the will's "double capacity for opposites" is interpreted by William Ockham in this way: "The one is evident and is a capacity for opposite objects or for opposite acts in succession, so that a created will can will something at t1, and not will it or will against it at t2. The other is a nonevident capacity for opposites without succession." Predestination, God's Foreknowledge, and Future Contingents, translated by M. M. Adams and N. Kretzmann (New York: Appleton, 1969), Q. III, p. 72. For Ockham's own views on the contingency of the will and his criticism of Scotus, see Q. III, pp. 71-76 and Appendix I, pp. 80-92.

of the agent's will to determine itself in initiating volitions, which in turn bring about certain actions.

Scotus considers there to be at least four elements which compose a voluntary action--the will, a volition (considered as a proper act of the will *qua* faculty), the intellect, and some object presented to the will by the intellect. A necessary condition for every voluntary action is that there be the intimate cooperation of the will and the intellect in causing a volition; otherwise the act of will would be a blind one and the action would not be done voluntarily. An act of will, as an instance of a willing of something, cannot occur without some object's being confronted by the intellect and the will--one cannot, in other words, will something unknown.[39] The intellect, however, does not function contingently, as the will is said to function, but operates with a natural necessity, being itself bound to conform to truth and to certain laws of thought.[40] Its role is that of thinking and forming concepts; but its role in human action is that of presenting the will with an object for some action. This object is presented to the will under the same conditions under which it is apprehended by the intellect.[41]

The intellect's presentation of some known object is not, in Scotus's view, an initiating cause of the will's acts; it is only a

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[39] Creswell, p. 152; Effler, p. 163.

[40] Creswell, pp. 150-51; Effler, p. 164.

[41] *Opus Oxoniense*, IV. d. 14, qu. 1, n. 13. Cited in Berard Vogt, "The Metaphysics of Human Liberty in Duns Scotus", *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, 16 (1940), p. 30.

sine qua non condition. In order for there to be an instance of voluntary action, the agent's will and his intellect must concur in eliciting a volition--and only in their cooperation do the intellect and the will bring about a volition. The intellect, in knowing some object, operates here as a "partial" cause of a volition; whereas the will, being the contingent cause of its own acts, is held to be the principal cause of its acts and to be not causally determined by the intellect to act on a given presented object. Scotus explains this in a passage from the Magnae Additiones:

> The soul as a power of knowing is a partial cause, in so far as it is active according to its nature, just as the will as a partial cause is active according to its nature. The total cause of the act of will consists of the power of the will, the intellect as a faculty of knowing, and the actual knowing of an object conceptually or actually present. Although these concur in causing an act of will, yet the act of will is freely produced, because it lies in the power of the will to act or not to act. When it acts, the other partial causes necessarily act along with it; if it does not act, the other partial causes are not active. For, although no one of these partial causes can come into effect unless the other partial causes naturally cooperate, nevertheless the will makes use of the other causes so that the effect results. Yet it remains in the power of the will to use these partial causes; hence the will acts freely; just as I see freely because I can use the visual power whenever I wish. Whenever the free cause is inactive even while the other cause is active, so that the total cause is ineffective, then the whole action is free.[42]

Thus in virtue of the will's role as the principal and contingent cause of its volitions, the will is capable of acting or not acting on a given known object; and it is because the will determines itself in acting or not acting that the resulting actions are free.

Scotus employs the term 'indifference' (prima indifferentia) in

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[42] Quoted in Creswell, p. 153. See also Effler, p. 163.

explaining the initial condition of the will when engaging in action. When presented by the intellect with an object to be acted on, the will is said to be "indifferent" toward this object--the will is not in any way determined by this object to act or to elicit an act of will.[43] Not being determined to act in a given situation, the will, if it does act, thus remains the sole free cause of its volitions. Scotus considers it a distinctive character of the human will that it does possess this extreme freedom (or indifference) with respect to actions of opposite kinds and to equally weighted alternatives.

To establish that the will as a faculty of the human soul is a principle of contingent action--that it is a free or undetermined cause--Scotus appeals to experience; for "whoever makes an act of will experiences in himself that he can also not will".[44] Moreover, "when someone else presents to him something as good and even shows it as a good to be considered and willed, he can turn away from it and refuse to elicit any act of will towards it".[45] Thus the fact that human agents possess this radical freedom and contingency of will is considered by Scotus to be a basic datum of personal experience.

Descartes is also one who attributes an extreme freedom to human agents in virtue of the nature of the will. According to Descartes, it is a fact known by personal experience (or introspection)

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[43] Quaestiones Quodlibetales, XXI. n. 14. Cited in Bourke, Will in Western Thought, pp. 85 and 98.

[44] Quaestiones subtilissimae super libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis, IX. qu. 15, n. 15. Cited in Creswell, p. 147.

[45] Opus Oxoniense, IV. d. 45, qu. 10 n. 10, Creswell, p. 147.

that human agents possess free will, which he equates with liberty of choice;[46] and this experienced freedom is such that "no one, when he considers himself alone, fails to experience the fact that to will and to be free are the same thing".[47] He considers the power of the will, or of human choice, to consist in the fact that "we have the power to do a thing or not to do it (that is to say, to affirm or to deny, to pursue or to shun), or rather in this alone, that in affirming or denying, pursuing or shunning, what is presented to us by the understanding, we so act that we have no feeling of being constrained to it by any external force".[48] Also attributed to the human agent is "liberty of indifference", where equally good or appealing objects are presented to an agent and, being indifferent toward them, he is capable of selecting either one. But Descartes does not think that the situation of indifference best exemplifies free will; it rather constitutes the lowest grade of human freedom. Although the will is intrinsically free, it is by its nature inclined toward what is good and true, and in being presented with a choice between alternatives not indifferently balanced, the will more freely inclines toward the good and more freely assents to it:

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[46] Philosophical Writings, Norman Kemp Smith, trans. (New York: Modern Library, 1958), Meditation IV, p. 216.

[47] The Philosophical Works of Descartes, translated by E. S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (New York: Dover Publications, 1955), II, 75. See also Meditation IV, Phil. Writings, p. 280.

[48] Phil. Writings, Meditation IV, p. 216.

> For in order to be free it is not necessary that I should be indifferent in the choice between alternatives; on the contrary, the more I am inclined toward one of them, whether because I approve it as evidently good and true, or because God in this inward manner determines my inward thinking, the more freely do I choose and embrace it.... The indifference of which I am aware when for want of a reason I am not carried to one side rather than to another, is the lowest grade of liberty, testifying to a lack of knowledge, i.e., to a certain negation, not to a perfection of the will. Were the true and the good always clear to me, I should never need to deliberate as to what I ought to judge or choose, and I should thus be entirely free, without ever being indifferent.[49]

Descartes considers human freedom to be best characterized when the agent is not faced with indifferently balanced alternatives, where one is much better than the other, and the agent is still capable of choosing either one.[50]

In attributing free will to human agents, though, Descartes is of course assigning this freedom to the human soul, a pure thinking substance, which is united to a physical or corporeal body. A human being, in his unique view, is a unity of composition: an incorporeal substance, whose essence is thought, and a corporeal substance--a body --which is subject to the laws of nature. The human body is a mechanical apparatus (as are all so-called lower animals) and, considered in itself, the human body acts and reacts mechanically and operates under physical causes and laws. What is said to distinguish this mechanical human body from the animal body is the fact that conjoined to the former is an immaterial soul. The will itself is made a distinct operation of

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[49] Ibid., pp. 216-17.

[50] Descartes, Philosophical Letters, Anthony Kenny, ed. and trans. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), Letter to Mesland, 9 February, 1645, pp. 159-60.

the soul, as is the understanding, which cooperates with the will in eliciting voluntary actions.

Although the unity of soul and body is problematic for Descartes, he does consider the notion of their union to be a primitive one and, moreover, to be a fact of sense experience.[51] The difficulty remains, however, to render intelligible the interaction between the two distinct substances; and Descartes attempts to do this by way of the pineal gland (conarium), a gland which he locates in the mid-brain, wherein the soul and the body are said to engage in their commerce with each other.

Descartes refers to the actions of the soul as "volitions", and these are said to be of two irreducible kinds--those which terminate in the soul itself (e.g., voluntary thoughts) and those which terminate in the body, "as when from our merely willing to walk, it follows that our legs are moved and that we walk".[52] A volition, Descartes maintains, "consists entirely in this, that simply by willing it makes the small gland to which it is closely united move in the way requisite for producing the effect aimed at in the volition".[53] Since the human soul is a substance whose essence is thought, its acts--its volitions--are

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[51] On this point, see Phil. Letters, Letter to Elizabeth, 21 May, 1643, pp. 137-40, esp. p. 138; and Letter to Hyperaspistes, August, 1641, p. 111.

[52] Phil. Writings, The Passions of the Soul, Articles 17 and 18, p. 268.

[53] Ibid., Article 41, p. 280.

construed as different ways of thinking.[54] In affirming some physical action to be accomplished, for example, the agent's act of will causes the pineal gland to impel the "animal spirits"[55] toward the parts of the body required for a bodily movement of some sort; what follows from the movement of the pineal gland is then a purely mechanical operation of the body.[56] Although each volition is said to be connected with a specific movement of the pineal gland, some volitions are said to have no direct control over some movements of this gland:

> Thus, for instance, if we wish to adjust our eyes for the apprehension of a far-distant object, this volition causes the pupil to enlarge; and if we wish to look at a very near object, this volition causes it to contract. Should we, however, think only of enlarging the pupil, we may indeed so will, but we do not thereby enlarge it. For it is not with the volition to enlarge or contract the pupil that nature has connected the movement of the gland which serves to impel the spirits toward the optic nerve in the manner requisite for this enlarging or contracting of the pupil, but instead with that of looking at objects distant or near.[57]

In this view, then, Descartes considers all voluntary movements of one's body to be brought about indirectly, since they occur via volitions and the movements of the pineal gland. The only direct actions

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[54] Phil. Letters, Letter to Mersenne, May, 1637, p. 32.

[55] Descartes refers to the animal spirits as "the most animated and subtle portions of the blood" which reside in the cavities of the brain, the nervous system, and the muscles; and it is by means of the animal spirits that the body is set in motion. Such a view fits the interpretation that, for Descartes, the human body is moved by an inner system of hydraulics. See Phil. Letters, Letter to Plempius for Fromonden, 30 October, 1637, p. 36, and Letter to Buitendijck, 1643, p. 146.

[56] Phil. Writings, Passions, Article 43, p. 281.

[57] Ibid., Article 44, p. 28.

are volitions, considered as the immediate acts of a human agent. He does claim, moreover, that we are not lodged in the body "merely as a pilot in a ship", and this would indeed suggest that there are some actions, in his view, which human agents do directly and do not thereby cause to occur.[58]

3. Thomas Aquinas and the Will as Rational Appetite

During the medieval era, the view that the human soul is the immediate agent of its activities (cf. Augustine's use of 'voluntas') was gradually replaced, at least in influence, by psychologies that attributed distinct functions of the person to a plurality of potencies or faculties. This historical move toward a "faculty psychology",[59] given impetus in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries by the new Latin translations of the Aristotelian corpus, finds a fairly mature expression in the psychology of Thomas Aquinas and in his very detailed theory of action.

Incorporated into Aquinas's theory of action we find not only the Scholastic view of man as a substantial soul-body unity but also a view which accords the person's soul various powers or faculties

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[58] This is appropriately suggestly by Arthur Danto in "Basic Actions", American Philosophical Quarterly, II (1965), pp. 141-48.

[59] St. Bonaventure, writing in the thirteenth century, argues explicitly for the adoption of a faculty psychology. See William G. Thompson, "The Doctrine of Free Choice in Saint Bonaventure", Franciscan Studies, 18 (1958), pp. 1-8. Father Thompson interprets him as seeking "to reconcile the traditional ideas of Augustine with the growing interest in Aristotle".

through which he acts and engages the movements of his body;[60] and indispensable to his theory is the view that one such faculty--the will--is a rational or intellectual appetite.

Appetition itself, as understood by Aquinas, is an act of inclining or tending toward something considered as a good or an end, and every kind of being, in his view, has an end to which it naturally inclines. What specifies the act of appetition in things, as well as their proper accidents, is their substantial form, determining not only what sort of a thing a being is but also its capabilities and the ends to which it naturally inclines. In the following passage from the Summa Theologica, Aquinas distinguishes three types of appetition --the natural, the sensitive, and the rational:

> Since every inclination results from a form, the natural appetite results from a form existing in the nature of things, while the sensitive appetite, as also the intellectual or rational appetite, called the will, follows from an apprehended form. Therefore, just as the natural appetite tends to good existing in a thing, so the animal or voluntary appetite tends to the apprehended good.[61]

Because man is essentially a rational creature, there is specified in man a rational appetite or will (voluntas), inclining a person toward or away from individual objects intellectually known or apprehended

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[60] According to Aquinas, there is a real distinction between the soul and its faculties, the natural properties of the soul, and between the faculties themselves. See Summa Theologica, I. Q. 77, articles 1-6. Cf. footnote 32 above.

[61] I-II. Q. 8, art. 1, Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas, Anton C. Pegis, ed. (New York: Random House, 1945), Vol. II. An example of natural appetition is that of the tending of iron filings to a magnet.

through reason as universally good.[62] This is so by virtue of the soul in man, the form of the human body and its animating principle, which confers on man both his natural operations and his rationality. Since man is a being capable of sensation, he is said to possess a sensitive appetite, the natural objects of which are particular goods apprehended through sense perception.[63] What distinguishes the will in man from the other appetites is the claim that the ends or objects of the will are goods apprehended through reason.

A person's so-called "willed" actions are thus those which proceed from the acts of his power of rational appetition. Aquinas divides the objects of the faculty of will into ends and means, since, in his view, one who wills an end attains that end by willing also the means to it; and the ends of the will are, as we have seen, certain intelligible goods intellectually known and desired for their own sake, whereas the means are goods desired for the sake of an end and considered as objects without which the end could not be attained.[64] Although

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[62] A formal proof of the existence of the will (or rational appetite) in intellectual beings, including God, is to be found in Summa Theologica, I. Q. 19, art. 1. For a concise historical survey of the concept of rational appetite, see Bourke, Will in Western Thought, pp. 9-10 and 54-71.

[63] The departments of man's psychological structure include, in Aquinas's view, a rational appetite, a sensitive faculty—comprising the five external senses and four "internal" senses—the power of locomotion, and a rational cognitive faculty. Natural appetite is not a faculty in man. On Aquinas's psychology, see Frederick Copleston, Aquinas (London: Penguin Books, 1955), Chapter 4.

[64] Since some ends may be, and often are, means to a more remote end, such a view entails that there be a final end of rational appetition. For a discussion of this final end, the perfect good or

a person might incline naturally toward, say, the pleasure of eating a certain food, he would will as an end the understood goodness of the food or that for the sake of which the food is eaten (e.g., vitamins, health); and in attaining that end the person thereby wills the means to it--namely, eating the food. It is through willing the end that one comes to will the means to it, and one wills the means to it only if the end is willed.[65] In this way, then, a person's actions involve in their execution a continuous activity of his will on the level of ends and means. For the result of appetite itself is the use of some power other than the appetite for the attainment of the desired objective:

> Now the good in general, which has the nature of an end, is the object of the will. Consequently, in this respect, the will moves the other powers of the soul to their acts, for we make use of the other powers when we will. For the ends and the perfections of every other power are included under the object of the will as particular goods; and the art or power, to which the universal end belongs, always moves to their acts the arts or powers to which belong the particular ends included in the universal end.[66]

A person's actions thus involve, in this view, the activity of his faculty of will on the level of ends and means, whereby a desired end is attained through the willing of the means to it and through the employment of the other powers of his soul.

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bonus completissimum, see Summa Theologica, I-II, Q. 1-5, and Summa Contra Gentiles, III. xvii and xviii.

[65] Summa Theol., I-II, Q. 8, art. 3, ad. 2 and ad. 3. See also I-II, Q. 12, art. 4.

[66] Ibid., I-II, Q. 9, art. 1. Cf. I, Q. 82, art. 4.

From the initiation of action to its culmination, though, there is said to be an ordering of the will's acts both with respect to an end and with respect to the means to it. According to Aquinas, the faculty of will stands in a threefold relation to the end:

> First, absolutely, and thus we have volition, by which we will absolutely to have health and so forth. Secondly, it considers the end as its place of rest, and thus enjoyment regards the end. Thirdly, it considers the end as the term towards which something is ordained; and thus intention regards the end. For when we speak of intending to have health, we mean not only that we will to have it, but that we will to reach it by means of something else.[67]

With respect to the object of one's will, therefore, three acts of will are involved--volition, enjoyment, and intention. Volition (velle: to will) is the first act of the will, and all subsequent acts of will, ordered from initiation to completion, take place under its auspices. This is a natural movement of the will, being a tending of the faculty of rational appetite toward an intelligible good considered as the sake for which an action is done. Enjoyment or fruition (fruitio), the second ordered act of the will, is the will's act with respect to a possessed or an unpossessed good--a volitional satisfaction of an end considered as the resting place of the will's activities.[68] The third act of the will with respect to an end, intention, is an inclination of the will toward an end considered as the terminus of the will's movement and considered as that for which the means to it are willed.[69]

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[67] Ibid., I-II, Q. 12, art. 1, ad. 4.

[68] See Summa Theol., I-II, Q. 11, articles 1-4.

[69] Summa Theol., I-II, Q. 12, articles 1-5.

Concerning the will of the means to an end, there are also three acts of the will ordered in relation to the means: consent, choice, and use. Following intention there is generated an intellectual inquiry of the means to the desired end, since "the reason must institute an inquiry before deciding on what is to be chosen; and this inquiry is called counsel".[70] Counsel is a type of practical reasoning or deliberation, performed by the soul's faculty of intellect, which terminates in a judgement about the means within the person's power to initiate and appropriate for the attainment of the desired end.[71] After the means have been determined, there follows consent (consentire), an act of will whereby certain means are consented to and desired, for "the final decision of what is to be done is the consent to the act".[72] Next in the order of the will's acts with regard to the means is choice or election (electio), an act of will which gives preference to one of the consented means by choosing it. Aquinas considers this a combined activity of the intellect and the will: substantially or materially it is an act of the will, but formally it is an act of the intellect.[73] Use is the last in the order of the will's acts, and this stands between choice of the means and the execution of the action for the attainment of the end, because use (usus) is the act

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[70] Ibid., I-II, Q. 14, art. 1.

[71] Ibid., I-II, Q. 14, art. 6.

[72] Ibid., I-II, Q. 15, art. 4; see also articles 1-3.

[73] Ibid., I-II, Q. 13, art. 1 and articles 2-6.

of the will by which the other powers of the soul are employed--much like instruments--in carrying out the means for the attainment of the end.[74] This is the will's tending to the realization of the means willed for the attainment of the end; and the result of this--at least with respect to overt behavior--is a directed sequence of bodily movements considered as the means for the sake of the end.[75] What specifies the powers or faculties used in bringing about the requisite means is the "command" (imperium) of the intellect, an act of reason which directs the powers of the soul employed.[76]

On Aquinas's view, then, a person's action comprises a sequence of acts of his faculty of will. This is initiated by a volition, the first act of rational appetition, and extends through a choice of the means to the willed end, culminating finally in the execution of certain behavior considered as the means to the intended end. Such an account is, of course, teleological and purposive. The end of an action does not efficiently cause a volition of the person who apprehends it as something to be done; rather, it moves the person's will as a final cause, inclining the person to it on the level of rational appetite

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[74] Ibid., I-II, Q. 16, art. 1.

[75] One's bodily members, the "organs of the soul's power", are "moved through the powers of the soul". Summa Theol., I-II, Q. 17, art., 9.

[76] "For after the decision of counsel, which is the reason's judgement, the will chooses; and after choice, the reason commands that power which has to do what was chosen; and then, last of all, someone's will begins the act of use, by executing the command of reason...." Summa Theol., Q. 17, art. 3, ad. 1.

and considered as the sake for which his action is initiated and completed.

4. Volition as Reason's Decree--Spinoza's Theory of Will

Still another philosophical view of the nature of man characterizes the locus of his actions and activities in intellectualist terms, thereby stressing the role of human understanding and conferring on human thought a dynamic feature. When, in this view, the human agent is seen as possessing a "will", the acts of this will are interpreted as a type of intellectual judgement; for human actions are not, this view maintains, merely pieces of behavior linked somehow to the activity of a human will, but rather they are the offspring of human reason and decision.

There are clear overtones of such a perspective in Aquinas's consideration of the will as a faculty of rational appetite or intellectual desire, and there are further similarities in the psychology of Descartes, who, as we have seen, considered willing to be a special kind of thinking. But the strongest representative of this view is Benedict Spinoza, who set forth in his mature philosophical work, the Ethics, an identification of volition with human understanding. It is Spinoza's view which we will consider here.

Certain preliminaries to an understanding of Spinoza's concept of volition, however, require that we get at least a practical grasp of the related notions of appetite, desire, and will; and this requires an acquaintance with his view of the person as a modification of a single substance.

The metaphysical scheme of Spinoza's Ethics allows only one unique substance, or God, and an infinity of attributes of this substance. Of these attributes two are said to be known to us--thought and extension--and it is through them that finite minds and finite bodies are said to be known. Finite individuals, according to Spinoza, are "modifications of the attributes of God, or modes by which the attributes of God are expressed in a fixed and definite manner";[77] and since finite things are modes of God, the one substance, they thereby derive both their essence and their existence from God.[78] In possessing an essence, though, a thing can only be destroyed by some cause external to it, and, if it exists, it does not contain in itself anything which can take away its existence.[79] Thus, Spinoza tells us, "everything, in so far as it is in itself, endeavors to persist in its own being".[80] For from the given essence of a thing certain consequences necessarily follow, including the opposition to what can take away its existence; and the endeavor of an individual to persist in its own being--its conatus--is "nothing else but the actual essence of a thing".[81]

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[77] Ethics, Part I, Proposition 25, Corollary, The Chief Works of Spinoza, R. H. M. Elwes, trans. (New York: Dover Publications, 1951), Vol. II.

[78] Ibid., I. 25.

[79] Ibid., III. 4 and 5.

[80] Ibid., III. 6.

[81] Ibid., III. 7.

Since a human being is an individual mode of substance, or of God, a human being is exemplified through the twin attributes of thought and extension and is thereby conceivable either as mind or as body, for "mind and body are one and the same thing, conceived first under the attribute of thought, secondly, under the attribute of extension".[82] The human mind knows the body only through the ideas of the modifications or affections of the body,[83] and in doing so it is conscious of itself or has knowledge of itself;[84] and whatever modifications occur in the body also occur as ideas in the mind.[85]

As an individual thing, the human being endeavors to persist in his own being; and since the mind is conscious of itself through the ideas of the modifications of the body, it is also conscious of this endeavor.[86] In the Scholium to Proposition 9 of Part III, Spinoza divides this endeavor into two aspects--will and appetite. When referred solely to mind, it is will, and when referred to the conjunction of mind and body, it is appetite; and this endeavor, he explains, is "nothing else but man's essence, from the nature of which necessarily follow all those results which tend to its preservation; and which man has been determined to perform". In other words, from the essence

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[82] Ibid., III. 2, Scholium.

[83] Ibid., II. 23.

[84] Ibid., II. 23 and II. 21.

[85] Ibid., II. 12.

[86] Ibid., III. 9, Demonstration.

of an individual person certain things follow which tend to the preservation of his being and which determine him to do certain things.

There is also desire, which, Spinoza claims, is no different from appetite but is "generally applied to men, in so far as they are conscious of their appetite".[87] He further explains his position in the first definition of the Emotions, where 'desire' is defined as "the actual essence of man, in so far as it is conceived, as determined to a particular activity by some given modification of itself", including the phrase 'in so far as it is determined by some given modification of itself', he tells us, in order to indicate the "cause" of the consciousness. We may presumably take the import of this addition to be that an idea of the modifications or appetites of the body is required for a person to be determined to any action or activity.[88]

As we have seen, Spinoza considers the "will" to be the endeavor of the person when related to mind alone. But such a will is not a faculty of the mind, he argues, because the will has no existence apart from the mind, which, being a fixed and determinate mode of thought, cannot be the free cause of its activities and thus cannot possess absolute faculties.[89] All such faculties are merely

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[87] Ibid., III. 9, Scholium.

[88] See David Bidney, The Psychology and Ethics of Spinoza, (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), p. 86. According to Bidney, 'desire' refers to the body and the mind and of which the mind is conscious, 'appetite' refers to the body and of which the mind is not conscious, and 'will' refers to the mind alone.

[89] Ethics, II. 48.

general terms for the particular constituents of the mind, the essence of which is constituted by certain adequate and inadequate ideas; and since the mind itself is constituted by a complex of ideas,[90] there is in the mind no faculty of the intellect or understanding and no faculty of the will, he argues, but only individual ideas and volitions:

> Thus the intellect and the will stand in the same relation to this or that idea, or this or that volition, as "lapidity" to this or that stone, or as "man" to Peter and Paul.[91]

Yet Spinoza goes further in maintaining that volitions are themselves nothing but ideas involving affirmation and denial: "There is in the mind no absolute faculty of positive or negative volition, but only particular volitions, namely, this or that affirmation, or this or that negation."[92] Since "willing" is a mode of thought and is therefore just another sort of thinking, the reduction of the alleged faculty to constituent volitions also reduces volitions to individual thoughts or ideas which uniquely embody either an affirmation or a denial. But since will and understanding, considered as faculties, are nothing more than individual volitions and ideas, then, since a particular volition and a particular idea are one and the same thing, will and understanding are one and the same thing.[93] Ideas, according

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[90] Ibid., II. 15.

[91] Ibid., II. 48, Scholium.

[92] Ibid., II. 49

[93] Ibid., II. 49, Corollary and Demonstration.

to Spinoza, are therefore particular affirmations or denials, differing according to the sorts of ideas and comprising even perceptions.[94] To have an idea is thus, in Spinoza's view, to affirm or deny something (as to have an idea of a triangle is to affirm that its three interior angles are equal to two right angles) and similarly to choose one thing or another is merely to assent to one thing or another. In construing all ideas as volitional, or all ideas as "assertive" ideas, Spinoza thereby reduces speculative thought and practical deliberative thought to one and the same sort of mode of thinking. Volitions become intellectual judgements and thus irreducible components of the general process of understanding. The differences between volitions are constituted only by that which differentiates individual ideas--by the content of the idea itself:

> for, in this respect, particular affirmations differ one from the other, as much as do ideas. For instance, the affirmation which involves the idea of a circle, differs from that which involves the idea of a triangle, as much as the idea of a circle differs from the idea of a triangle.[95]

Since desire is the essence of man as determined to a particular activity, it would therefore seem that, for Spinoza, the desires of a person determine him to bring about certain actions. Yet when considered under the attribute of thought, desire is "will", although the will is only a general term denoting individual volitions and is not something over and above the mind's particular volitions, which are in turn only unique ideas constituting the mind itself. Corresponding

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[94] Ibid., II. 49, Scholium.

[95] Ibid., II. 49, Scholium.

to will, when desire is considered under the attribute of extension, is "appetite"; and in any context of action a correspondence is all that there would be, since "body cannot determine mind to think, neither can mind determine body to motion and rest".[96] What determines mind to think can only be another mode of thought, and what determines body to motion-and-rest can only be exemplified under the attribute of extension. According to Spinoza, there can be no cross-currents among modes of different attributes. Yet since "the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and the connection of things",[97] what we find in one mode we should also expect to find in its corresponding mode of a different attribute.

"All these considerations clearly show," Spinoza tells us, "that a mental decision and a bodily appetite, or determined state, are simultaneous, or rather are one and the same thing, which we call decision, when it is regarded under and explained through the attribute of thought, and a conditioned state, when it is regarded under the attribute of extension, and deduced from the laws of motion and rest."[98] This is so, it would seem, because the endeavor of the mind, which Spinoza equates with the mind's "power of thought", when considered as will, is in a given person simultaneous with the endeavor of the body, which is equated with the body's "power of action".[99]

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[96] Ibid., III. 2.

[97] Ibid., II. 7.

[98] Ibid., III. 2, Scholium.

[99] Ibid., III. 28, Demonstration.

On the one hand, we have individual ideas of which something is affirmed or denied--viz., individual volitions which are conditioned by causes other than themselves--and we have, on the other hand, certain modifications of the body. In this way, then, a mental decision, a decretum of the mind, and a determination of the body are brought to a single point, expressible either under the attribute of thought or under the attribute of extension; and during the bringing about of an action by a given individual, it seems, there would occur these simultaneous episodes.

The "agency" of a person's action comes about when he is the "adequate cause" of the action, an adequate cause being, for Spinoza, "a cause through which its effect can be clearly and distinctly perceived".[100] Thus an event which follows solely from the conscious desires of an agent, as its adequate cause, is considered to be an action of that agent. Under the attribute of extension, then, when a person is determined to a given activity, there are physical strivings or appetites of his body; corresponding to this, under the attribute of thought, are individual volitions which affirm some modifications of his body. This is so, in Spinoza's system, because the human ability to engage in action is identified with the human ability to understand. Human actions thereby become certain events which are hereditary with respect to the volitions of an agent.

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[100] Ibid., III. Definitions 1 and 2. See also III. 3.

5. Action as Behavior Plus an Antecedent Volition

The view of volition and will which we shall consider in this final segment of our historical survey had a status as dogma for most philosophers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and it is the one most likely to be regarded as today's received version of the volitional theory of action. The distinctive feature of this view is that human action is to be construed as a unique cause-effect sequence: A certain item of a person's behavior is an action, this view maintains, when and if such behavior occurs as an effect of a peculiar mental cause of the person. The will, when this perspective includes it, is styled as a dynamic element of the mind whose capacity it is to bring about behavior, and its acts are named as executors of this task; but should proponents of this view discard the notion of will, 'volition' alone is employed to identify this antecedent cause, although such phrases as 'acts of willing' and 'acts of volition' are used variously. John Stuart Mill, for example, gives us a succinct statement of this influential position:

> Now what is an action? Not one thing, but a series of two things: the state of mind called volition, followed by an effect. The volition or intention to produce the effect, is one thing; the effect produced in consequence of the intention, is another thing; the two together constitute the action. I form the purpose of instantly moving my arm; that is a state of my mind: my arm (not being tied or paralytic) moves in obedience to my purpose; that is a physical fact, consequent on a state of my mind. The intention, followed by the fact, or (if we prefer the expression) the fact when preceded and caused by the intention, is called the act of moving my arm.[101]

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[101] A System of Logic (10th ed.; London: Longmans, 1879), I, 59-60.

Yet Mill is not without predecessors. John Locke defines the will as a faculty or power of the mind by which persons initiate the motions of their bodies and the "actions" of their minds:

> This, at least, I think evident: that we find in ourselves a power to begin or forbear, continue or end several actions of our minds and motions of our bodies, barely by a thought or preference of the mind ordering or, as it were commanding, the doing or not doing such or such a particular action.[102]

Locke refers to the actual exercise of this power as "volition or willing", which, he tells us, is "an act of the mind knowingly exerting that dominion it takes itself to have over any part of the man, by employing it in, or withholding it from, any particular action".[103] What is said to give rise to the exercise of the will is "desire", which is characterized as an "uneasiness" or "disquiet" of the mind "for want of some absent good";[104] and the presence of volition, according to Locke, also specifies whether the mental or bodily behavior following from it is voluntary or involuntary.[105]

David Hume, when he discusses volition and will in his Treatise of Human Nature, employs 'will' as "the internal impression we feel and are conscious of, when we knowingly give rise to any new motion of our body, or new perception of our mind";[106] and although

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[102] An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, John Yolton, ed. (New York and London: Everyman's Library, 1974), II. 21. 5.

[103] Ibid., II. 21. 15.

[104] Ibid., II. 21. 31, esp. 30-47.

[105] Ibid., II. 21. 5.

[106] Treatise, L. A. Selby-Bigge, ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), II. iii, i.

it is treated as a datum of introspection, it is not, he objects, a power or faculty of the mind. Equating the idea of power with that of "necessary connexion",[107] Hume argues that the will and its acts have no such connection with their attendant effects, since it is not discoverable among the items of our experience, and that the causal relation obtaining between volitions and behavior--like those between physical objects--is a law-like regularity among observable things and events:

> So far from perceiving the connexion betwixt an act of volition, and a motion of the body, 'tis allow'd that no effect is more inexplicable from the powers and essence of thought and matter. Nor is the empire of the will over our mind more intelligible. The effect is there distinguishable and separable from the cause, and cou'd not be foreseen without the experience of their constant conjunction. We have command over the mind to a certain degree, but beyond that lose all empire over it: And 'tis evidently impossible to fix any precise bounds to our authority where we consult not experience.[108]

Any knowledge of future events--including our own behavioral events--has only an inductive basis, according to Hume; and this in turn is said to be grounded in the contingent cause-effect relation which holds between observed matters of fact. In his first Enquiry, Hume advances several arguments against the view that in engaging in action we may experience directly a "power" which binds our volitions and the appropriate behavior with a non-contingent relation. Of special interest here is one argument which, I think, summarizes Hume's

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[107] Ibid., I. iii, xiv; see esp. p. 157--"the terms of efficacy, agency, power, force, energy, necessity, connexion, and productive quality, are all nearly synonimous...."

[108] Ibid., Appendix, pp. 632-33.

own stand on the exercise of volition and which has influenced other writers on the same topic.[109] Hume argues here that because a volition and its behavioral effect--both of which are open to personal inspection--are separated by a neurophysiological chain of events of which we are not aware, a volition and an item of behavior have no "necessary connexion" between them:

> We learn from anatomy, that the immediate object of power in voluntary motion, is not the member itself which is moved, but certain muscles, and nerves, and animal spirits, and, perhaps something still more minute and more unknown, through which the motion is successively propagated, ere it reach the member itself whose motion is the immediate object of volition.... Here the mind wills a certain event: Immediately another event, unknown to ourselves, and totally different from the one intended, is produced: This event produces another, equally unknown: Till at last, through a long succession, the desired event is produced.[110]

Thus, in Hume's view, a volition is a peculiar "mental" cause, having its effects in mental operations and in physical behavior, and having a quality which would distinguish it from its attendant effect. This is so because the relation between a volition and certain behavior is contingent and consists in the de facto constancy of the two sequential events; and any knowledge claims about their connection, and thus any claims about future behavior, can only be grounded on

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[109] For example: Thomas Reid, Essays on the Active Powers of Man, Essay I, Chapter vii. William Hamilton, Lectures on Metaphysics, cited approvingly by J. S. Mill in A System of Logic, p. 411. C. D. Broad, The Mind and its Place in Nature (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1925), pp. 101-3. C. A. Campbell, On Selfhood and Godhood (London: Allen & Unwin, 1957), Lecture 8.

[110] An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, L. A. Selby-Bigge, ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), VII. i, p. 66.

induction and inference from past experience. According to Hume, moreover, what gives rise to action is a felt "passion" or "sentiment"; and in this way willing becomes an activity motivated by certain emotions and never motivated by reason or matters of fact.[111] As special mental episodes, though, volitions are efficient causes which are distinguishable from their behavioral effects and which precede them always as a matter of contingent fact.

This version of the volitional theory of action also found its way into British jurisprudence. John Austin, for example, construes actions or "acts" as the consequent bodily movements of volitions, characterized as certain desires or wishes for the movements themselves. To will is thus "to wish or desire one of these bodily movements which immediately follow our desires of them". He summarizes his position in this way:

> Our desires of these bodily movements which immediately follow our desires of them, are therefore the only objects which can be styled volitions; or (if you like the expression better) which can be styled acts of will. And as these are the only volitions; so are the bodily movements, by which they are immediately followed, the only acts or actions (properly so called). It will be admitted on the mere statement, that the only objects which can be called acts, are consequences of Volitions. A voluntary movement of my body, or a movement which follows a volition, is an act.[112]

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[111] Treatise, II. iii, iii, pp. 413-18. "Since reason alone can never produce any action, or give rise to volition, I infer, that the same faculty is as incapable of preventing volition, or of disputing the preference with any passion or emotion"--pp. 414-15. Those reasons which do motivate the will are the "calm passions", which are "readily taken for the determinations of reason". See p. 417 and II. iii, ix, esp. p. 439.

[112] Lectures on Jurisprudence, Robert Campbell, ed. (5th ed; London: John Murray, 1885), Lecture 19, p. 424. See also pp. 414-15.

Our brief survey of this tradition's use of the volitional theory has revealed, I think, a certain emphasis upon volition as a peculiar mental event which, when tied causally to behavior following from it, is meant to provide the theorist with an analysis of human action. Some recent philosophers have treated this view as the standard for the volitional theory of action, and, finding it in many ways inadequate, they have advanced arguments against the volitional theory with this exemplar in hand. These arguments will be considered and evaluated in their turn. The point to be stressed here is that the volitional theory has been imbedded in several traditions and philosophies; and it is for this reason that the theory is many-sided. Since I shall be considering both its theoretical adequacy and its philosophical merits, the perspective taken must be sufficiently wide to include any important nuances the theory might contain. This broad perspective has taken in several representative versions of the theory, and the general picture which emerges includes not only an emphasis upon volitions as special causes of certain behavior but also a treatment of volitions as occurrences which themselves qualify as actions persons do. I want to preserve this picture in giving the theory an analytical foundation; for our broad perspective must now give way to a narrower view, and this requires, in effect, that a statement, or statements, of the theory's position on human action be provided. This is my task in the next chapter.

III

VOLITIONS AND ATOMIC ACTIONS

We have seen that the volitional theory comprises a variety of philosophical positions on the nature and execution of human action. But there is, I believe, a core to this complex. In its simplest form, the volitional theory is a theory of action which analyzes and defines a person's action in terms of a volition, a certain item of behavior, and a fundamental tie between the two. Before we can consider this theory in further detail, however, we must state to what claims about human action the volitional theorist is, or seems to be, committed. I propose as tentative the following definitions:

(1) A human action is an item of behavior of a person which is transeuntly caused, or immanently brought about, by a volition of the person.

(2) A human action is a volition of a person which transeuntly causes or immanently brings about certain behavior of the person.

There are advantages to both of these definitions. Definition (1) is broad enough to allow an interpretation of "volition" as a peculiar mental act, as a unique mental event, as a neurophysiological event, or as a theoretical entity invoked either to provide the theory with explanatory force where phenomenological questions make the theory suspect or to construe the theory as a better working hypothesis than alternative theories of action. Definition (2) has the advantage of allowing a use for 'volition' as a "willing", an act of will, a mental act, or other such acts which are themselves things said to be done by the person—a use very close to Descartes', inter

alios. Both definitions, moreover, permit the use of two concepts of causation which are today most argued for in the context of human action--transeunt and immanent causation. The phrases 'transeuntly causes' and 'transeuntly caused' have been used to mark off transeunt causation, basically a Humean notion, in which the connection between cause and effect is construed as extrinsic and usually nomological. Similarly, the phrases 'immanently brings about' and 'immanently brought about' have been used to designate immanent causation, which is an Aristotelian-Scholastic notion, and here the connection between cause and effect is seen as intrinsic or conceptual.

Although the volitional theory of action embraces at least one of these definitions, there are immediate difficulties for this list if the theory is to embrace both. This is so because their claims about human action are mutually exclusive; when employed in pairs, the resulting statements, though still tentative, are in each case rendered circular.[113]

If we are to allow the volitional theorist to make one or both of these claims, we must set down certain guidelines for their interchangeability and otherwise state the final definitions of a human action; and this is also required if we are to continue to treat the

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[113] When combined, definitions (1) and (2) yield this statement: A human action is an item of behavior of a person which is transeuntly caused or immanently brought about by a human action of the person. Alternatively the combination of (2) and (1) yields this statement: A human action is a volition of a person which transeuntly causes or immanently brings about a human action of the person. In each case the definiendum appears in the definiens. It should be noted that part of the difficulty lies in the interpretation of the term 'volition'.

volitional theory as a unified theory, however diversified its versions might be. Moreover, we must stop using the word 'action' uncritically, because, as we shall see, its ambiguous use has led to the basic incompatibility of definitions (1) and (2). Certain distinctions are now in order.

Because to do something is to perform an action, a human action is thus something which a human agent does or performs. The relevant distinction here is between something which is an instance of a person's agency[114] and something which happens to the person. (The historical distinction is between action and passion.) But a human action is also a certain kind of thing which a person does; and this is so because some of the things a person may be said to do are not actions at all, but are rather non-actions.

The phrase 'doing an action' is an important stand-in for what verbs of action we employ in characterizing and in describing the actions and deeds of personal agents.[115] As a stand-in, though, 'doing an action' does require a ground level description, and the range of

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[114] I use the word 'agency' is a sense broader than that employed in agency theories of action, in which what defines an action is that it is a unique instance of agent causation, usually treated as a primitive concept.

[115] Cf. J. L. Austin's similar point in "A Plea for Excuses", Philosophical Papers, J. O. Urmson and G. J. Warnock, eds. (2nd ed; London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 178-79. Austin further cautions us against the myth of the verb: "We treat the expression, 'doing an action', no longer as a stand-in for a verb with a personal subject, as which it no doubt has some uses, and might have more if the range of verbs were not left unspecified, but as a self-explanatory, ground level description, one which brings adequately into the open the essential features of everything that comes, by simple inspection, under it."

verbs available as replacements is not unlimited. The doing or performance of actions is ordinarily expressed in terms of familiar activity verbs (e.g., looking for, running a race), as opposed to achievement verbs (e.g., seeing, winning a race), in terms of which actions are not to be expressed; for one may perform actions in looking for something, but one does no action whatever in finding the thing sought. We could further maintain, however, that those activity verbs used in ascribing an action to someone, and where the agent may significantly be said to be its author, comprises that range of verbs for which 'doing an action' is a stand-in.[116]

The distinction between non-action and forbearing is a familiar one, since some of the actions persons do are instance of the latter. A person who forbears from doing something does an action, while a person who does no action also does not forbear (we normally do not forbear when we sleep). Compare, for example, a man who is napping in his hammock and an escaped prisoner who, while crouching behind a tree, forbears from moving his limbs so that he does not thereby alert his jailers. In this case, the escaped prisoner does perform an action--he forbears--while the man in the hammock does no action whatsoever in napping. The difference here turns upon the not-doing of action A and the doing of action not-A.

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[116] A more common means of limiting the range of those verbs which are to be used as action-verbs is employed by Anthony Kenny in Action, Emotion and Will (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 154, where 'verb of action' is construed as a verb which may occur as the main verb in the answer to a question of the form 'What did A do?'. The obvious objection to this convention is that it is not sufficient to single out "action-verbs". Ignoring the actor's his-

The general upshot of this discussion is to underscore the fact that (human) actions are unique "doings"; a person does an action, and when it has been done, it is the person's deed. To ascribe an action to someone is to ascribe not only responsibility for the action but its authorship as well. Thus any analysis of human action must provide theoretical room for the word 'does' as an auxiliary of action verbs because it is required by the features of our common stock of words. If we can agree that the starting-point for any honest investigation of the nature and rudiments of human action rests upon certain elements of common discourse, we will not sever the volitional theory--nor any philosophical theory--from its roots in common sense; for to do otherwise is to dispatch the philosophical adventure toward a trail of mystery, without hope of return.

Further distinctions rest now on what I term atomic actions, non-atomic actions, and instrumental actions. If actions are done, and if engaging in action is doing or performing certain actions, then it follows that the doing of an action is either direct or indirect. For it is analytic that actions are done either without an intermediary which is itself an action or with some such intermediary, and in this latter case the action is done through the doing of another ac-

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trionics, we may note that persons normally do not perform actions of falling asleep; but that a person A fell asleep may be the answer to a question of the form specified by Kenny, where the past tense of 'fall' occurs as the main verb in the declarative sentence. Kenny's admirable motive for focusing on action-verbs is to draw out the implications of their relational character and to emphasize this character in the description of actions. For the purposes of my discussion here, I merely broach the problem of categorizing those verbs which are to be stand-ins for 'doing an action', although I do assume that we (can) agree upon the limiting range of these verbs.

tion. When actions are done indirectly, they are instrumental actions--they are actions done through or by means of another action. If all actions are instrumental actions, however, one never does an action. This is so because an infinite number of actions would have to be done in the single performance of an action--in which case the resulting regress turns out to be vicious--and also because what cannot be done directly cannot be done indirectly. If all actions are done indirectly, and thus instrumentally, then no action can be done directly, and therefore no actions can be done.[117] Such a situation has forced action theorists to employ as fundamental what I term atomic actions--simple and indivisible actions which are done directly and done not through or by means of another action. To say, therefore, that a person does an action is to say either that the person does the action through doing another action, in which case the action is instrumental and non-atomic, or that the person does the action directly and does not perform it by means of another action, which is simply to say that the action is an atomic action. If, for example, I move my left hand with my right hand, then, assuming for the moment that I can move my right hand as an atomic action, I move

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[117] A similar argument is employed by George Berkeley in An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision, sections 9-10: "It is evident that, when the mind perceives any idea not immediately and of itself, it must be by means of some other idea.... Moreover, it is evident that no idea which is not itself perceived can be to me the means of perceiving any other idea." He directs this against the thesis that we perceive objects at a distance; his point is that since we do not perceive distance or "outness" directly, we cannot perceive objects at a distance, for that is only to perceive them by means of perceiving their distance.

my left hand instrumentally, since I move it only by means of moving my right hand; and because I here move my left hand instrumentally, and not as an atomic action, the action of moving my left hand is in this case an instrumental action.

Although all instrumental actions are non-atomic, as I have construed them, not all non-atomic actions are instrumental actions. For a person may clearly do an action in doing another action and yet not do the action by means of the other. If we can accept Arthur Danto's treatment of mediated and composite actions,[118] then those non-atomic actions which would not be instrumental are those actions which comprise a certain sequence or set of atomic actions. Such actions, though non-atomic, are what I term molecular actions: they are actions which are accomplished in a certain sequence or set of atomic actions, and the actions involved are done directly and not through the doing of others. When a person does an action, then, it is either atomic or non-atomic; if the action is non-atomic, it is either a molecular action, involving in its execution a set or sequence of atomic actions, or an instrumental action, which is done by means of an atomic action.

I have indulged in this digression in order to provide leverage for the emendation of our proposed definitions (1) and (2). Before proceeding with the refinements, however, some loose-ends need to be tied. If we define an action, human or otherwise, wholly in terms of

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[118] See his Analytical Philosophy of Action (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 28-30.

those conditions under which it is correct to assert that something is an action, we thereby ignore those further conditions under which it is the case that something is an action. These two conditions are not to be conflated, and to do so is to commit a methodological error. But if we grant, as we seem justified in doing, that the phrase 'doing an action' is a stand-in for those activity verbs in terms of which actions are ascribed to certain agents, and where the agent in question may significantly be said to be the author of the action, then, should we so define an action in this way, we are still left with the task of deciding upon those conditions under which it is the case that the agent indeed does the action so ascribed to him. We may certainly concede that an action is that activity which is executed and controlled by the agent who does it, and that what an agent does, in a strict sense of 'does', is an action. But under what conditions are we to determine that an action--any action--is done?

The volitional theory is an attempt to answer such a question. How well, and to what extent, its analysis of a human action is theoretically and philosophically adequate is a question which shall be dealt with in the next chapter. The question still before us is just what analysis the volitional theory is to provide. Although the theorist can maintain that a human action is that which a person does, in a strict sense of 'does', to claim adequacy for an analysis of a human action is also to claim adequacy for an analysis of the important action-locution 'a person does an action'. Because the primary, though not the only, use of action terms in declarative sentences is their predication of subjects, the attempt to define what an action is must

be explicated in terms of its ascription to certain agents; and to ascribe an action to an agent is also to ascribe the action's authorship. This is merely to require that an analysis of a human action, as well as an investigation of those conditions under which it is the case that an action is done, be in terms of the action-locution 'a person does an action'.

As we have seen, an action is either atomic or non-atomic. In virtue of this, then, the word 'action' that appeared in the proposed definitions (1) and (2) is now ambiguous, ranging over not only atomic actions but also non-atomic actions, which are either instrumental or molecular. Since there are actions if and only if there are atomic actions, and since non-atomic actions are done only if the atomic actions which they presuppose are done, the analysis of a human action must extend itself to these direct and minimal actions, atomic actions. In stating the refined definitions of a human action, therefore, we should do so in terms of atomic actions, and these are to be expressed in terms of the key phrase 'a person does an action'. For if the definitions will not prove adequate for either an atomic action or its doing by a person, the framework is thereby fundamentally vitiated; it will then have to be discarded since it cannot prove adequate for any human action. This treatment of the definitions we attribute to the volitional theory is further required if we are to place the theory among the visible alternative philosophical theories of action. Its long heritage demands that we be charitable in our dealings with it, and only on solid grounds will ascertaining whether it is correct or incorrect serve to further the philosophical cause.

I shall propose and attribute to the volitional theory two definitions of a human action. The definiendum of each will be in terms of an atomic action and its doing by a person, whereas the definiens of each will be stated in terms of conditions which are deemed necessary and sufficient for the doing of an atomic action by a person; and I shall consider these conditions to be those under which it is the case, according to the volitional theory, that a person does an atomic action. When the word 'behavior' is an ingredient in the definiens, it is to be interpreted as the sort of occurrence which may be mental or bodily, since actions themselves range over the mental and bodily doings of (human) agents. Although deputizing certain mental episodes as actions may seem to involve us in conceptual difficulties, since we ordinarily consider, e.g., "calculating in one's head" and "picturing to oneself" to be items among a person's repertoire of actions, I am not convinced that there is, or need be, any conceptual difficulty; for mental doings are nevertheless actions of a sort. Because a paradigm case of human action involves intentionality or purposiveness, I shall assume those conditions which make a human action so and limit the definitions proposed to intentional actions. We are now in a position to attribute the following definitions to the volitional theory of action:

D1. A person does an atomic action A if and only if (i) there occurs a volition V of the person, and (ii) there occurs an item of behavior B of the person, and (iii) V transeuntly causes or immanently brings about B.

D2. A person does an atomic action A if and only if (i) there occurs a volition V of the person.

A comment is necessary here. Although the definiens of D2 makes no reference to a behavioral episode, an interpretation of volition as an item of mental or bodily behavior is not thereby excluded, and I do not wish to rule out any such interpretation since some contemporary volitional theorists do construe volitions in this way.[119] What seems queer about D2, though, is that nothing in the definiens distinguishes a volition which happens to a person from that of which the person is the executor. But we cannot include in D2 the condition that a volition be caused or brought about by the person, for in the language of agency this is only to say (via a full circle) that it is a direct and minimal action which the person does. Nor is such an addition necessary. The definiens of D2 marks off a unique act or behavioral activity of the person, the occurrence of which fulfills a condition which guarantees the truth of the statement 'A person does an atomic action A'.

It is clear that while D2 limits the components of a person's atomic actions to volitions, D1 extends the scope of the components to include a volition and a causally related item of behavior. As such, though, D1 and D2 are not interchangeable, since one includes

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[119] The following philosophers have committed themselves to a rendition of D2: Bruce Aune, in "Prichard, Action, and Volition", Philosophical Studies, 27 (1974), pp. 97-116; Hugh McCann, in "Volition and Basic Action", Phil. Review, 83 (1974), pp. 451-73, and in "Trying, Paralysis, and Volition", Rev. Metaphysics, 28 (1975), pp. 423-42; and H. A. Prichard, in "Acting, Willing, and Desiring", Moral Obligation (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), pp. 187-98. Each interprets volitions as behavioral occurrences which are something mental or something cerebral.

in the definition what the other must truncate. Although not interchangeable, they are compatible claims, for both employ volitions as fundamental components of (atomic) actions; they merely state alternative, though not contradictory, claims. The volitional theory has been divided in this way because various theorists within the tradition have employed both volitions and the volition-and-behavior sequence as "actions"; space has thus been provided for either position, and the proposed definitions preserve the theory's unity.

A rendering of the volitional theory would not be complete, at least in its minimal expression, without a statement of the defining conditions for the claim that a person does an instrumental action. In extending D1 and D2, respectively, we thus generate the following definitions of an instrumental human action.

D3. A person does an instrumental action I if and only if (i) there occurs a volition V of the person, (ii) there occurs an item of behavior B of the person and an event E, (iii) V and B are each components of an atomic action A, (iv) A and E are each components of action I, (v) V transeuntly causes or immanently brings about B, and (vi) B transeuntly causes or immanently brings about E.

D4. A person does an instrumental action I if and only if (i) there occurs a volition V of the person, (ii) there occurs an event E, (iii) V is a component of atomic action A, (iv) A and E are each components of action I, and (v) V transeuntly causes or immanently brings about E.

It should be noted that condition (iii) of D3 and condition (iii) of D4 guarantee not only that the instrumental action is done through, or by means of, an atomic action but also that the atomic action contained therein is both causally atomic and causally direct; in this way, then, the instrumental actions specified in D3 and D4 are in each case caus-

ally non-atomic. Although D4 allows a behavioral upshot to be a causal element of only an instrumental action, it nevertheless permits the theorist maintaining D2 to include other pieces of mental or bodily behavior in the analysis of a human action, albeit as event components of non-atomic actions. Similarly, D3 allows the theorist who embraces D1 to include events and items of behavior in an analysis of an instrumental action.

What may be considered the defining statements of the volitional theory have now been given, and the analysis of a human action has turned out to be not one but two. Each, however, is part of a single theory--a theory of human action employing "volitions", whether acts or unique behavioral occurrences, as fundamental constituents of human actions and pivotal elements of those conditions under which 'a person does an action' is to be considered true. We must now proceed with our examination and adjudication of the volitional theory.

IV

A REFUTATION OF THE VOLITIONAL THEORY

The volitional theory, like so many other philosophical theories, contains within itself certain weaknesses. While some of these involve its theoretical structure, others lie in the key terms upon which it rests; but none of these, as I hope to demonstrate, is a controverting feature of the theory itself. Before we can embark upon a full examination of the theory, these weaknesses must be unearthed, and thus the immediate task facing us is to indicate these areas of tension and, where possible, to buttress them. This will be done in light of certain criticisms--the stock arguments--which have been leveled against the theory in recent years.

1. Recent Criticism

The volitional theory has been assailed by contemporary philosophers on three main fronts. Two of these concentrate on the logical propriety of the theory itself, while the third concerns itself with the empirical and/or phenomenological status of "volitions". I shall identify these respectively as (i) the regress argument, (ii) the connection-puzzle argument, and (iii) the no-description argument. Each will be considered in turn, and my intention here is to deflect the first two arguments, and to show that the third--like the former two--does not dissolve the theory as it stands, although, as I further intend to demonstrate, the truth of the third argument requires that the traditional claims about volitions be modified considerably; and

this modification will be carried into our examination and adjudication of the volitional theory.

The regress argument, the most common of the stock arguments directed against the volitional theory, purports to demonstrate on a priori grounds that the theory is logically incoherent; and although it takes several forms, each is meant to generate a vicious regress from the claim that an action uniquely embodies an "act of will" or a volition. The most economical statement of the argument is this: If an action is an event which is caused or brought about by a volition, and if a volition is itself an action, then a volition is an event which is caused or brought about by a volition, and so on ad infinitum.[120]

Because we have interpreted the volitional theory in terms of D1 and D2, there are two replies to the regress argument. The one is that no vicious regress comes about if an atomic action is a volition which needs no further volition as a means to its accomplishment; for although the argument incorporates the word 'action' ambiguously, this is resolved by directing the argument against D4 and interpreting 'action' as 'instrumental action'. But the parent analysis of D4 is D2,

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[120] While I am responsible for stating the argument in this way, the various versions of it are to be found in the following: Alisdaire MacIntyre, "The Antecedents of Action", in British Analytical Philosophy, Williams and Montefiore, eds. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 209; A. I. Melden, Free Action (New York: Humanities Press, 1961), p. 45; H. A. Prichard, "Acting, Willing, and Desiring"; Thomas Reid, Essays on the Active Powers of Man, Essay IV, Chapter i, p. 601, where it is attributed to Hobbes; Gilbert Ryle, The Concept of Mind (London: Hutchinson, 1949), p. 67; Richard Taylor, Action and Purpose (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1966), pp. 71-72.

and no regress follows from considering an atomic action as an occurrent volition, since its presence fulfills a condition which thereby guarantees that a person does an atomic action. Similarly, no regress results from interpreting 'action' as 'atomic action', for then a volition is not itself an action but something whose place as one condition of the definiens of D1 guarantees, when it and the other conditions are fulfilled, that a person does an atomic action.

Thus the force of the regress argument does not lie in any structural defect in the volitional theory; it rather lies in a failure to distinguish between the twin analyses D1 and D2, as well as in the fact that the philosophical community has often used the word 'action' ambiguously. It would not be immodest to claim that interpreting the volitional theory in terms of D1 and D2--including the derivative analyses D3 and D4--allows the theory to escape the regress argument altogether.

What I have identified as the connection-puzzle argument has its roots in the present orthodox view that a logical connection excludes a causal connection, and the claim here is that the volitional theory is logically incoherent because the relation between a volition and an item of behavior is allegedly both causal and logical. A. I. Melden presents the argument in this way:

> Let the interior event we call 'the act of volition' be mental or physical (which it is will make no difference at all), it must be logically distinct from the alleged effect--this is surely one lesson we can derive from a reading of Hume's discussion of causality. Yet nothing can be an act of volition that is not logically connected with that which is willed--the act of willing is intelligible only as the act of willing whatever it is that is willed. In short, there could not be such

> an interior event like an act of volition since ... nothing could have the required logical consequences.[121]

Melden does not say why a volition cannot be describe independently of its resultant behavior, but presumably this is posed as a descriptive difficulty for the theorists embracing D1, D3 and D4. As an objection, though, the argument is subject to interpretation. If he is claiming that the only logically possible way of describing a volition is by reference to its effect, then surely his claim turns out to be false. For it is logically possible that the volition, as an item of personal awareness, be described by some quality it might possess; a similar characterization is logically possible if the volition is identified with a neural event. But the claim breaks down even if the stronger thesis is that a description of a volition necessarily describes its behavioral effect; for then a volition (as a mental act or event) becomes something described by its formal structure--that is, propcsitional--and although the demand for separate descriptions is not in fact met, it does not follow that it is a priori necessary that a piece of behavior results when a volition occurs. The occurrence of a volition having a propositional structure does not entail that the behavioral upshot does occur; this is a contingent matter, just as it is when a volition is identified with a physical event. Melden has therefore not established his contention that a volition and an item of behavior are not causally related. His demand that a volition be describable with reference to something other than

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[121] Free Action, p. 53. See also page 114. It is similarly presented by Richard Taylor in Action and Purpose, pp. 68-69.

its effect perhaps involves nothing more than the practical difficulty of producing a description of a privileged event.

Another version of the connection-puzzle argument rests on a misunderstanding of the analysis provided by the volitional theory, and the objection here is that volitions "are events distinguishable from actions, always as a matter of contingent fact preceding them; and they are events necessarily connected with actions in that without them what followed would not be an action".[122] Since these are incompatible, it is argued, the volitional theory involves an incoherence. But clearly a volition may be a necessary condition for an action, while it need not be the cause of the actions itself. The volition may certainly be, as our account would render it, the cause of an event whose occurrence is logically required for the truth of the claim that a person does an action; and in this way, then, a volition does not cause an action--in spite of the traditional assertions to the contrary--but rather it results in certain behavior the occurrence of which, when tied causally to an occurrent volition, guarantees that an action is done.[123] Therefore, because our account of the volitional theory does not confuse a necessary condition with a cause, this version of the connection-puzzle argument is also deflected.

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[122] Alisdaire MacIntyre, "The Antecedents of Action", p. 206. Cf. the distinction between causa cognoscendi and causa fiendi.

[123] Tradition maintained that volitions bring about actions; but if presented as an analysis of human action, the volitional the-

What is important to note of the connection-puzzle argument is its demand of the volitional theory that it provide some individuating description of a volition and what behavior is said to follow from it. If the theory fails to provide such a description, then, since the connection-puzzle argument is inconclusive, this is either because of a practical difficulty involved in describing a volition or because there are no volitions. Yet there is another argument --the no-description argument--which purports to demonstrate that there are no volitions because volitions are not experienced and are thus not describable. I shall argue that this argument also fails to establish its case against the volitional theory.

One cannot, of course, prove by a logical demonstration that there are no volitions as long as the description or definition of them involves no self-contradiction; but similarly one cannot prove logically that there are volitions independently of a factual or empirical demonstration. Many philosophers, as we have seen, have indeed thought that we initiate and control our behavior in virtue of a capability we are said to have for performing volitions or acts of will; this was treated as an indubitable fact about our nature since one could allegedly tell that there were volitions merely by reflection. This is unfortunately part of the "dogma" of volitions --that acts of will are supposed to be items among the common man's repertoire, and that the only philosophically interesting problem is where to place them in a metaphysical system. Is this point of depar-

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ory then renders itself circular and invites a vitiating regress. Our statements of the theory methodologically avoid this problem.

ture misguided? One force of the no-description argument is the doubt it casts on the tradition's claim that the volitional theory is founded upon a factual account of how we act. Richard Taylor, in Action and Purpose, expresses such doubts in this way:

> No one has ever arrived at a belief in volitions by observing them. They find no place in the data of empirical psychology, nor does it appear that anyone has ever found volitions occurring within himself, or within his mind, by any introspective scrutiny of his mental life. It is doubtful, in fact, whether any such thing as a volition, as construed by this theory, has ever occurred under the sun, and this would seem at least to be a defect in the volitional theory, whatever its philosophical merits.[124]

Of course, the claim that no one has ever found a volition is not a philosophical argument against them. But Taylor's statement is none the less pointed, and the implied defect is presumably that volitions, as mental causes or mental events, are alleged to be available for phenomenological inspection; should such things fail to be unearthed by an honest introspective evaluation of what occurs when we act, then surely the account it provides is incorrect. This objection can be strengthened by a statement of the no-description argument: If I experience a volition, then arguments are not needed to convince me that what I experience is a volition. Since I do not recognize a volition among the items of my personal awareness, arguments are needed to convince me that what I experience is a volition. Therefore, I do not experience volitions.[125] But this argument does

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[124] Op. cit., p. 66. See also p. 68. Cf. Bertrand Russell, Religion and Science (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 166.

[125] Although the statement of it is my own, I owe this argument, and one objection to it, to Myles Brand, The Nature of Human Action (Illinois: Scott, Foresman, 1970), p. 10.

not destroy the claim that persons have volitions, and it therefore does not refute the volitional theory. The first premise is false, since one may experience a volition and yet not be aware that what is experienced is a volition (thereby requiring arguments to prove that what is experienced is a volition). The argument has force only if it is assumed that it is a contradiction to suppose that there are experiences of ours of which we are not aware; but that we can have desires and motives which we are not--or never--aware of does not, I believe, involve any contradiction. As a first-person report, moreover, the conclusion 'I do not experience volitions' may in such a case be merely a fact about the person's psychological make-up: the person might be "volition blind".

A person who claims never to experience (or to be aware of) a volition cannot produce a phenomenological description of a volition if his claim is true. This entails a general point about volitions, even though the no-description argument fails as a refutation. For if some persons indeed claim that there are volitions on the basis of their experiences of them, and if, on the other hand, some claim never to experience them, arguing on this basis that there are no volitions, then, since each contradicts the other, this requires that there be specifiable criteria other than phenomenological testimony for the existence of volitions or acts of will and thus for their identification. This is so simply because the final arbitration of such a conflict must lie in an appeal to evidence which is independent of the relevant claims made by the contending parties; for to do otherwise is to beg the question at issue. (The alternative, of

course, is to make the presence of volitions in persons a statistical problem for psychology, but this is philosophically uninteresting.) To require that there be independent criteria for the existence and description of volitions, however, forces the volitional theorist to construe volitions as theoretical entities the experience of which is proposed as possible yet not guaranteed on the basis of ordinary experience. An identification of a volition with such common items of awareness as choice, decision, deliberation, and intention will not serve to side-step this requirement because, as Ryle has correctly pointed out,[126] we often engage in action in the absence of these antecedent occurrences. Thus the no-description argument, while not controverting the volitional theory, does require of the theory that it regard volitions as acts or events which a person may experience and be aware of, and that it further provide some criteria for their identification and some rules for the use of those expressions by which we should expect to characterize them. This is a perfectly general demand. But that the volitional theory must propose these volitions as theoretical entities clearly undermines the traditional view, if it was the traditional view, that volitions--and therefore a theory incorporating them--are vouchsafed by personal testimony. What can safely be concluded from this is that any talk about volitions is not to be done with the same assurance with which one speaks, say, of thoughts and feelings.

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[126] The Concept of Mind, pp. 68-69.

Most contemporary action theorists agree that volitions, as we have construed them, are indeed philosophical inventions, and they acquiesce in this view because an inspection of ordinary language fails to disclose a non-technical use for them and because they seem not to be existentially secured within the rich framework of human experience. Ryle's statement of this would seem to be decisive:

> If ordinary men never report the occurrence of these acts, for all that, according to the theory, they should be encountered vastly more frequently than headaches, or feelings of boredom; if ordinary vocabulary has no non-academic names for them; if we do not know how to settle simple questions about their frequency, duration or strength, then it is fair to conclude that their existence is not asserted on empirical grounds.[127]

Whether volitions are a philosophical invention is not the central issue here, even though it may be the case that the common man never thinks that his actions comprise acts of will. What is the central issue is the claim that volitions are phenomenologically (or empirically) guaranteed. But we have seen that this is not indubitable and that the final appeal lies elsewhere. This means, in effect, that the volitional theorist must propose volitions as theoretical entities whose reference and characterization within ordinary experience is to be made in accordance with specified rules. I have labored this final point because what needed to be made clear, or perhaps underscored, was just what status volitions or acts of will could have for this theory. This status we finally know to be theoretical, even though it may be true that volitions have always had a status as theoretical posits, albeit as things which the volitional theorist

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[127] Ibid., p. 65.

thought everyone was certain of; this would mean, of course, that the volitional theory has in fact enjoyed its long heritage as a fully fledged theory of human action.

2. The Critical Appraisal and Adjudication

Our critical evaluation of the volitional theory will center, of course, on analyses D1 and D2. A fundamental test in each case will be whether the proposed analysis can account for those commonsensical facts of human agency to which we, as ordinary persons, would honestly attest; for a philosophical theory of action which cannot account for such facts thereby fails as an analysis because it is precisely these facts which it attempts to clarify, and to render more intelligible, within its theoretical structure. In this way, then, the test is whether the volitional theory can complete what it set out to do.[128] Since one aim of restructuring the analyses of the volitional theory was directed toward presenting a coherent theory capable of critical evaluation, the concern here will not be with the theory's coherence; deflecting the important stock arguments against the theory has, I think, resolved this question.

Analysis D2, if we remember, presented the following account of a human action:

> A person does an atomic action A if and only if there occurs a volition V of the person.

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[128] This, indeed, is the crux of explicating any philosophical theory within ordinary language and of rendering it intelligible therein. But common sense has no full legislative force here, and it is certainly not an unerring guide in matters of first philosophy--although neither is any philosophy if it cannot be translated into ordinary discourse, for it then dangles in a netherworld.

On this analysis, of course, the performance of an atomic action is guaranteed when there occurs a volition. But is this analysis a correct one? Our concern here will be with the adequacy of the theoretical picture it portrays, and we shall see that it is decidedly incorrect when its consequences are considered.

The picture is certainly odd if we attend to its offspring, analysis D4. The metaphysical scenario here includes a volition, an event of some sort--presumably a piece of mental or bodily behavior --and a causal tie between the volition and the behavior. The causal nexus obtaining between them guarantees that the rising of my arm, for example, is an action when it proceeds causally from the appropriate volition; such an action is then an instrumental action when this pattern is exemplified. It is on this model that I raise my arm much in the same way as I move a stone or push a lever; for I raise my arm when my volition brings it about that my arm rises, in much the same way as I move a stone or push a lever when I bring it about that one is moved in the appropriate way by means of an action which I perform. So much for the scenario. Let us put this model to work on a special, but familiar, class of actions--forbearances.

According to the account presented by D4, I move my arm when there occurs a volition of mine which brings it about that my arm rises; and when this causal pattern is fulfilled, I raise my arm, albeit instrumentally. Suppose, however, that I forbear from raising my arm. In this scheme, I forbear from raising my arm by bringing it about that my arm does not rise, and one of the two conceivable ways I effect this is either by not acting on the volition-action level or

by acting in such a way on the volition-action level that my arm does not rise--for example, by willing to keep my arm down at my side when there are causes operating such that my arm rises unless I act to keep it from rising. In each case, though, either I act or I do not act, and in each case this might suffice to warrant our saying that I forbear from raising my arm. I am not convinced that this is a competent analysis of forbearing, nor do I think that D4 has an alternative account open to it, but I shall forego this discussion until we have seen what these considerations do to analysis D2. Because forbearances count among those atomic actions we do, we should expect the volitional theorist who maintains D2 to provide us with some account of our forbearing from an atomic action when the atomic action is constituted, in this case, by a volition. Such an account is not forthcoming, however, since the only forbearances D2 will admit vitiate the analysis.

We previously contrasted the doing of an action with both not-doing an action and doing a "not-action". We must grant that both not-doing A and doing not-A have an important feature in common --the action which is done and that which is to be forborne in each case does not occur. Forbearing from raising my arm, for example, entails that I do not raise my arm and thus that the action is omitted, although it does not entail that the usual result of my raising my arm does not occur, since one can forbear from raising one's arm and yet still undergo the arm's rising (I forbear from raising my arm, but someone lifts my arm up in the way it would have risen had I indeed raised it). It simply cannot be presumed, however, that omitted acts

are sufficient to designate forbearances; for otherwise we would be forced to conclude that a person who is not acting is forbearing from any action which he simultaneously can do and has the opportunity to do during the time of his not acting. To do an action and to forbear from doing it are thus to be distinguished, since the one is a not-doing of something, which is not acting at all, while the other is a doing of something; and we should expect the theorist who holds D2 to preserve this distinction.

What, then, is a forbearance on this model? If I forbear from doing atomic action A, it follows that I do not do atomic action A; and from D2 we should infer that there does not occur a volition V of mine. If I simply omit action A, though, we should similarly infer that there does not occur a volition V of mine. Unfortunately there is no longer a distinction between a forbearance and an omitted act. This, of course, is an absurdity. One does not express the fact of forbearance by claiming that during some interval there was no act, for this would be true when one is not acting at all.[129] The mere cessation of a volition does not, therefore, constitute a forbearance. In this way, then, analysis D2 breaks down: forbearances disappear completely into the class of omitted acts. One must accept this as a necessary and vitiating consequence of embracing D2 as an analysis of

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[129] Jeremy Bentham, for one, actually thought such a scheme was sufficient. Cf. his An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation: "Acts may be distinguished in several ways, for several purposes. They may be distinguished, in the first place, into positive and negative. By positive are meant such as consist in motion or exertion: by negative, such as consist in keeping at rest; that is, in forbearing to move or exert one's self in such and such

a human action--a consequence which is, as Peirce would say it, irrefragable. In virtue of this, then, we are justified in discarding D2 as a viable alternative philosophical analysis, since it has proved to be incorrect.

One of the compelling features of this analysis is that it seems to work for D4, and this perhaps explains why such a model has been a popular rendering of human action for centuries. But does it really work? If the piece of behavior which is logically required for what I am to forbear from doing is the rising of my arm, and I am thus to forbear from raising my arm, then, on this account, I forbear from raising my arm when I either do not act on the volition-action level or act in such a way on the volition-action level that my arm does not rise. Now consider an analogy with keeping a stone from rolling down a hill. The stone rolls down the hill unless I hold it in place, or stand in front of it and push, just as my arm rises unless I act in such a way that it does not rise, and this is supposed to warrant our saying that I forbear in each case. How foolish this picture is! I do not forbear from my rolling the stone down the hill, any more than I forbear from raising my arm, when in each case I hold it back and thereby keep it from moving. We do not forbear in such cases, any more than we forbear in holding our breath or in keep-

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circumstances. Thus, to strike is a positive act: not to strike on a certain occasion, a negative one. Positive acts are styled also acts of commission; negative, acts of omission or forbearance." Bentham thinks that it follows from this that negative acts may be characterized by positive expressions. The Works of Jeremy Bentham (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), Vol. I, Chapter VII, sect. viii, 36.

ing our teeth from chattering or in stifling a yawn. What I do in "forbearing from raising my arm" turns out to be nothing but keeping my arm from rising, or simply holding it down (in some volitional way) so that it does not rise on its own--but this is not forbearing. The alternative, which is equally of no help, is to claim that forbearing from raising my arm occurs when I do not act on the volition-action level; but this, as it was for D2, is not to do anything at all. Analysis D4 does not fail because of any structural defect, nor does D2 fail for this reason; they are simply incorrect, as we have demonstrated.

The important error involved in the view that our bodily behavior is fundamentally limited to instrumental actions is not that we can never execute bodily actions directly but that it implies that we enter into the neurophysiological chain of events when we participate in overt bodily action. If neurophysiological structure composes part of what a person is, then this view is indeed absurd --one cannot enter into what is in fact part of oneself. As an objection, though, this is easily deflected if bodily physiology does not make up any part of the person. One might claim, for example, that the person is a mental thing who executes bodily actions in virtue of the person's nature as an embodied entity. If this means, however, that what the human agent does directly is limited by nature to mental actions, it also means that persons are indeed lodged in the body as a pilot in a ship. But since the ship is thereby not part of the pilot, an agent-pilot does not enter into a part of himself in piloting the vessel instrumentally. As a vehicle for the

explication of D2, however, this view still leaves no room for direct and non-instrumental forbearances. When the agent-pilot forbears from a mental action, he is limited to the following alternatives: he can not act, in which case no volition occurs, or he can act, in which case either a volition occurs which guarantees what was meant to be forborne or a volition occurs which guarantees another atomic action. The former alternative, as we have seen, is not acting at all, and thus the agent-pilot does nothing in forbearing directly. The latter alternative leaves us either with the doing of the action which was to be forborne, which is not forbearing, or with the doing of another action. Doing another atomic action might seem to suffice for instrumental forbearances, since one could then be said to forbear from one action by doing another; but because what is needed is an account of non-instrumental forbearances, and because the alternatives resolve themselves into omissions and instrumental forbearances, we must conclude from this that such a metaphysical picture of human action is simply inadequate.

What has led philosophers to accept as legitimate the accounts of human action presented by D2 and D4? Some would like to think that such a motive lies in the theory's heritage, for it has carried with it the weight of an authority often more persuasive than arguments reached by sober philosophizing--the authority of the ancestral voice. Yet there are other reasons for finding these analyses attractive. One such reason involves the acceptance of certain metaphysical committments to the concept of the person. The account presented by D2 and D4 has often been cited as an important corollary

to the classic rendering of mind-body dualism, persuading some to claim, as G. N. A. Vesey does, that "what lies behind the use of the word 'will' is the thought that the mind is only accidentally embodied".[130] It is to be noted, however, that acts of will or volitions also find their place in materialistic and monistic portraits of the person; the use of 'will' is not limited fundamentally to dualism. But whatever the natural or displaced home of volitions, we must conclude from our previous discussion that these metaphysical homesteads require alternative accounts of human action in which to explicate their claims about the human constitution--accounts which do not rely on that presented by D2 and D4, since these analyses will not aid the disquisition of their doctrines one whit.

Another reason for the acceptance of these analyses rests entirely on a confusion between what is required for an agent to do an action and what an agent is required to do in performing actions. This has its point of departure in the consideration of the exigencies of possessing a human body: Our bodily limbs move in virtue of various causal conditions which must operate when we perform actions with those limbs. Those who take their physiology seriously agree that what is required for a person to raise his arm involves the movement of certain muscles, and this in turn requires that the appropriate nervous tissue in the muscles be excited by discharges from

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130 "Volition", Philosophy, 36 (1961); reprinted in Body and Mind, G. N. A. Vesey, ed. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964), p. 448. This view pays lip-service to Ryle's treatment of the will in The Concept of Mind, where volitions are placed among the activities of the ghost in the machine.

nerve endings connected to a vast channel of nerves which lead to centers in the cerebral cortex of the brain. But the error involved in taking this too seriously is to conclude from these considerations that what one does directly in acting can only be the initiation of this neurophysiological process. This, of course, chases a person's actions either into the recesses of the mind or into the brain, where volitions are supposed to grant the person an executive privilege over the bodily machine. But is this really warranted?

When I perform actions with my arm, let us grant for the moment, my arm moves or rises in the way it does only if certain muscles of mine first move. Because of what is involved in our living with a physical body, and because of certain physiological facts, some would want to conclude from this that I raise my arm only if I first move the appropriate muscles. This would mean, of course, that I do two actions--moving my muscles and raising my arm--wherein moving my muscles would be an atomic action, a component of the instrumental action of raising my arm by means of moving the requisite muscles. One need not stop there, though, for what is required for me to move the appropriate muscles involves an intricate causal sequence which begins, perhaps, in a certain region of the brain. Since we do not have personal access to this neurophysiological chain of events, any more than we know what muscles to move in acting, are we forced to conclude that a minimal action is merely the initiation of this causal sequence?

There is a fallacy in this, and I shall illustrate it with an analogy. Because a carriage moves forward only if the four indi-

vidual wheels first move, in order to move the carriage, one must therefore first move the four individual wheels. This, however, is false. One need not first move the four individual wheels in order to move the carriage--one needs only to move the carriage. It would follow both that the four individual wheels move and that they move first, but they are moved because the carriage is moved, and not because the wheels are first moved. This, I maintain, is also the case with performing simple actions with parts of one's body. In order to raise my arm, I am not required to move certain muscles first, nor am I required to set off the neurophysiological process in order to do so: I need only to raise my arm. It would similarly follow both that my muscles move and that the muscle movements and neural events occur first, but, as in the carriage example, I bring about these events because I raise my arm. We are not warranted, therefore, in concluding that a person must first exercise an executive privilege over occurrences of which the person has no personal awareness. Performing actions with the bodily parts would guarantee their being brought about, since they are required for us to perform certain overt actions, but they need not be things which we do first in accomplishing these overt actions.

An attractive feature of D1, and thus of D3, is that the confusion of what is required for an agent to do an action and what an agent is required to do in acting is not incorporated into the analysis, for the causal factors said to be involved in a person's action underlie the action being done and do not appear <u>en effet</u> in the doing

of the action; D1's analysis is made in terms of a certain proposed causal sequence which comprises a volition and a behavioral episode and into which the action a person does is analyzed. Redeeming considerations notwithstanding, we shall see that D1 also fails to yield a correct analysis of a human action. Before proceeding with our appraisal of it, let us restate the account presented by D1, which, as we know, is this:

> A person does an atomic action A if and only if (i) there occurs a volition V of the person, and (ii) there occurs an item of behavior B of the person, and (iii) V transeuntly causes or immanently brings about B.

Statements (i) through (iii) of D1 are proposed as conditions which, when fulfilled, warrant the truth of the claim that a person does an atomic action—and by analysis such conditions are to be constitutive of a person's atomic action. The analysis would allow us to infer from the fact that a person does an atomic action that the stipulated conditions obtain, and vice versa. As a practical tool, the presence of a volition would presumably provide an examiner with some means of deciding when an examinee's (overt) behavior is an action and when it is, say, a mere reflex; for here, as in its traditional role, a volition is formally the initiator of a piece of mental or bodily behavior which would thereby stand as an action if it does proceed causally from a volition. While the proposed volition may be characterized as a mental or cerebral event, or perhaps as a special mental act, the analysis is open to a number of traditional candidates in terms of which the volition is to be defined. But only the theoretical role and structure of D1 is of central concern here, and what

would indeed constitute an adequate test of the analysis is whether conditions (i), (ii), and (iii) can together be fulfilled and yet not be sufficient for the truth of the statement 'a person does an atomic action'. Let us proceed to put D1 to such a test; for if its conditions, when fulfilled, do not warrant our saying that a person does an action, we are justified in discarding its analysis, since it will then have been proved to be incorrect.

Suppose, for example, that a person's arm rises when he is injected with a certain drug or when point stimulation is made by an electrode on a segment of the "motor strip" along the person's cerebral cortex, and suppose further that the injected drug or the electrode stimulation in each case causes the person's arm to rise. Is the rising of his arm something which the person does? Whatever extraneous means such as these are employed in causing the person's arm to rise, we would certainly not consider this to be an instance in which he raises his arm. Not only does the person exercise no control over the arm-rising, but he contributes nothing to its occurrence (save by supplying our experimenter with a flexible arm and a functioning nervous system); the person's arm rises in much the same way as his knee might jerk when struck by a physician's hammer. We could extend this example by supposing that our hypothetical experimenter causes the person's arm to rise, or brings it about that it rises, whenever he pushes a button attached by special wires to the appropriate area of the person's brain, wherein either electrode stimulation occurs or a drug is injected; we then grant the experi-

menter a decisive control over the rising of the person's arm. But let us bring this hypothetical example to bear on analysis D1 and suppose that our experimenter not only causes or brings about the person's arm-rising, which we shall designate as "an item of behavior B", but that by pushing the button he brings about the occurrence of a volition V which causes or brings about the rising of the person's arm. Whether volition V is a mental or physical occurrence is of no consequence here, since mental events, as well as cerebral events, can have extraneous causes. Since we would grant that the person does not raise his arm--let us deputize this as "atomic action A"--when the experimenter pushes the button, but only undergoes the rising of his arm, we should grant that the person does not perform the atomic action of raising his arm when the experimenter, by pushing the button, causes a volition which then causes or brings about the person's arm-rising behavior. If the person does not raise his arm, and thus does not perform the atomic action of raising his arm, we should infer from analysis D1 that conditions (i) through (iii) do not obtain, or at least that one of them is unfulfilled. But each condition is in this case fulfilled, since our experimenter has extraneously brought them about. We have succeeded in fulfilling conditions (i)-(iii), since there occurs a volition V of the person, which then causes or brings about an item of behavior B of the person, and yet the person does not in this case raise his arm--he does not do the atomic action of raising his arm. Our conclusion must be that analysis D1 is simply incorrect as an analysis of a human action; and

we must similarly discard D3 as an adequate analysis because it fundamentally presupposes the truth of D1.[131]

It should be noted that the volitional theorist cannot take an apparent escape-route by claiming that the experimenter's causing the volition to occur is merely an instance in which a person is caused to do an action, for this claim is double-edged, and one edge vitiates the analysis. If the occurrence of the volition (however it makes its appearance) initiates a sequence of events which is to stand for the doing of an action, then, following the account afforded by the escape-route, the occurrence of the volition causes the doing of an atomic action--a destructive circularity which was supposed to have been ruled out by analyzing human action into a special train of events.

Yet let us suppose that D1 fails simply because it lacks certain conditions which, when fulfilled, would complete the required series and would thereby vouchsafe the truth of the claim that a person does an atomic action. Should we include, perhaps, a reason for the behavior (the person wants the experimenter to be pleased by the arm-rising) and an expectation of the behavioral occurrence? Even though the person wants the arm-rising to occur and expects its occur-

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[131] Counter-examples very similar to the one I have presented have been advanced against Donald Davidson's classic analysis in "Actions, Reasons, and Causes", Journal of Philosophy, 60 (1963), pp. 685-700. For more examples of what Davidson calls "wayward causal chains", see Roderick Chisolm, "Freedom and Action", in Keith Lehrer, ed., Freedom and Determinism (New York: Random House, 1966), pp. 28-44, and A. I. Goldman, A Theory of Human Action (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1970), pp. 60-61. Cf. also Arthur Danto, "What We Can Do", J. Phil., 60 (1963), pp. 435-445.

rence, our experimenter could still wave the person's arm with a push of the button; and we remain no more enlightened than when we began. Any number of such conditions may be added, however, and none of these could complete the required series as long as our experimenter has direct control over the occurrence of the person's volition. Perhaps, then, what needs to be included among the conditions provided by D1 is an "agency clause", a condition stipulating that the agent himself be the direct cause of the volition. This would clearly rule out the hypothetical experimenter example, since only the agent would be allowed direct access to the volition's occurrence; but in the language of agency this is only to require that it be the agent himself who does the action, and the analysis ends with what it attempted to analyze--volitions would no longer be necessary since the exercise of a person's agency is both necessary and sufficient for the doing of his atomic actions.

It might be said, though, that our hypothetical experimenter example fails because we have overlooked, for instance, a Scotistic interpretation of volition. It might be said, following Scotus, that only the will can be the sole cause of volitions, and that the possibility of free action resides therein. But whether the will is the sole cause of volitions is not helpful here, for it only alters the locus of the problem. If the will alone is the cause of a volition, then instead of an experimenter we could speak of the will as the cause of a volition V, and our example would still be much the same --the person's arm could rise and fall without the person's doing anything at all. In other words, conditions (i) through (iii) of D1

could be fulfilled in this way, and yet the person would still do nothing when his arm rises, and he would thereby not raise his arm. If we grant that our experimenter has control over the person's arm-rising, we can also admit this of a will; and thus the person remains an unwitting observer of behavioral occurrences which he undergoes and does not himself perform.

This, indeed, is a simple justification for omitting the will from a discussion of "free will". Whether actions are free depends not upon whether there is a will, but rather upon whether agents freely do or perform them. Since it is analytic that human actions are done by human agents, the question of free action (or free will) revolves about the question of those conditions under which it is the case that a person is free in doing an action. This, however, presupposes a satisfactory philosophical portrayal of the nature of an individual human action; and this is precisely what the volitional theory has failed to provide.

After much discussion, alas, we find that the volitional theory, whose core analyses are D1 and D2, has failed to furnish us with an adequate analysis of a simple human action. It has failed not because of any structural defect, as we have seen, but because its proposed account is incorrect. Unearthing the correct philosophical analysis of a human action proceeds, of course, along constructive lines--involving both systemic and extra-systemic considerations--but discarding the volitional theory as tradition's misconstrued portrait of human agency is, I believe, a firm step toward such a construction.

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