

Freedom of the Will

Jonathan Edwards

Part II.

**WHEREIN IT IS CONSIDERED WHETHER THERE IS OR CAN BE ANY SORT OF
FREEDOM OF WILL,
AS THAT WHEREIN ARMINIANS PLACE THE ESSENCE OF THE LIBERTY OF ALL
MORAL AGENTS;
AND WHETHER ANY SUCH THING EVER WAS OR CAN BE CONCEIVED OF.**

Section 5.

Showing, that if the things asserted in these evasions should be supposed to be true, they are altogether impertinent, and cannot help the cause of Arminian Liberty; and how, this being the state of the case, Arminian writers are obliged to talk inconsistently.

WHAT was last observed in the preceding section, may show— not only that the active nature of the soul cannot be a reason why an act of the Will is, or why it is in this manner rather than another, but also— that if it could be proved, that volitions are contingent events, their being and manner of being not fixed or determined by any cause, or any thing antecedent; it would not at all serve the purpose of Arminians, to establish their notion of freedom, as consisting in the Will's determination of itself, which supposes every free act of the Will to be determined by some act of the will going before; inasmuch as for the Will to determine a thing, is the same as for the soul to determine a thing by willing; and there is no way that the Will can determine an act of the Will, than by willing that act of the Will, or, which is the same thing, choosing it. So that here must be two acts of the Will in the case, one going before another, one conversant about the other, and the latter the object of the former, and chosen by the former. If the Will does not cause and determine the act by choice, it does not cause or determine it at all; for that which is not determined by choice, is not determined voluntarily or willingly: and to say, that the Will determines something which the soul does not determine willingly, is as much as to say, that something is done by the will, which the soul doth not with its Will.

So that if Arminian liberty of will, consisting in the Will determining its own acts, be maintained, the old absurdity and contradiction must be maintained, that every free act of Will is caused and determined by a foregoing free act of will. Which doth not consist with the free acts arising without any cause, and being so contingent, as not to be fixed by any thing foregoing. So that this evasion must be given up, as not at all relieving this sort of liberty, but directly destroying it.

And if it should be supposed, that the soul determines its own acts of Will some other way, than by a foregoing act of Will; still it will help not their cause. If it determines them by an act of the understanding, or some other power, then the Will does not determine itself; and so the self-determining power of the will is given up. And what liberty is there exercised, according to their own opinion of liberty, by the soul being determined by something besides its own choice? The acts of the Will, it is true, may be directed, and effectually determined and fixed; but it is not done by the soul's own Will and pleasure: there is no exercise at all of choice or Will in producing the effect: and if Will and choice are not exercised in it, how is the liberty of the Will exercised in it?

So that let Arminians turn which way they please with their notion of liberty, consisting in the Will determining its own acts, their notion destroys itself. If they hold every free act of Will to be determined by the soul's own free choice, or foregoing free act of Will; foregoing, either in the order of time, or nature; it implies that gross contradiction, that the first free act belonging to the affair, is determined by a free act which is before it. Or if they say, that the free acts of the Will are determined by some other act of the soul, and not an act of will or choice; this also destroys their notion of liberty consisting in the acts of the Will being determined by the will itself; or if they hold that the acts of the Will are determined by nothing at all that is prior to them, but that they are contingent in that sense, that they are determined and fixed by no cause at all; this also destroys their notion of liberty, consisting in the Will determining its own acts.

This being the true state of the Arminian notion of liberty, the writers who defend it are forced into gross inconsistencies, in what they say upon this subject. To instance in Dr. Whitby; he, in his discourse on the freedom of the Will, opposes the opinion of the Calvinists, who place man's liberty only in a power of doing what he will, as that wherein they plainly agree with Mr. Hobbes. And yet he himself mentions the very same notion of liberty, as the dictate of the sense and common reason of mankind, and a rule laid down by the light of nature; viz. that liberty is a power of acting from ourselves, or DOING WHAT WE WILL. This is indeed, as he says, a thing agreeable to the sense and common reason of mankind; and therefore it is not so much to be wondered at, that he unawares acknowledges it against himself: for if liberty does not consist in this, what else can be devised that it should consist in? If it be said, as Dr. Whitby elsewhere insists, that it does not only consist in liberty of doing what we will, but also a liberty of willing without necessity; still the question returns, what does that liberty of willing without necessity consist in, but in a power of willing as we please, without being impeded by a contrary necessity? or in other words, a liberty for the soul in its willing to act according to its own choice? Yea, this very thing the same author seems to allow, and suppose again and again, in the use he makes of sayings of the fathers, whom he quotes as his vouchers. Thus he cites the words of Origen, which he produces as a testimony on his side; "The soul acts by HER OWN CHOICE, and it is free for her to incline to whatever part SHE WILL." And those of Justin Martyr; "The doctrine of the Christians is this, that nothing is done or suffered according to fate, but that every man doth good or evil ACCORDING TO HIS OWN FREE CHOICE. And from Eusebius, these words; "If fate be established, philosophy and piety are overthrown.— All these things depending upon the necessity introduced by the stars, aloud not upon meditation

and exercise PROCEEDING FROM OUR OWN FREE CHOICE. And again, the words of MACCARIUS; “God, to preserve the liberty of man’s Will, suffered their bodies to die, that it might be IN THEIR CHOICE to turn to good or evil.” —”They who are acted by the Holy Spirit, are not held under any necessity, but have liberty to turn themselves, and DO WHAT THEY WILL in this life.”

Thus, the Doctor in effect comes into that very notion of liberty, which the Calvinists have; which he at the same time condemns, as agreeing with the opinion of Mr. Hobbes, namely, The soul acting by its own choice, men doing good or evil according to their own free choice, their being in that exercise which proceeds from their own free choice, having it in their choice to turn to good or evil, and doing what they will.” So that if men exercise this liberty in the acts of the will themselves, it must be in exerting acts of Will according to their own free choice; or, exerting acts of will that proceed from their choice. And if it be so, then let every one judge whether this does not suppose a free choice going before the free act of will, or whether an act of choice does not go before that act of the will which proceeds from it. And if it be thus with all free acts of the Will, then let every one judge, whether it will not follow that there is a free choice going before the first free act of the Will exerted in the case! And finally, let every one judge whether in the scheme of these writers there be any possibility of avoiding these absurdities.

If liberty consists, as Dr. Whitby himself says, in a man’s doing what he will; and a man exercises this liberty, not only in external actions, but in the acts of the will themselves; then so far as liberty is exercised in the latter, it consists in willing what he wills: and if any say so, one of these two things must be meant, either, 1. That a man has power to will, as he does will; because what he wills, he wills; and therefore power to will what he has power to will. If this be their meaning, then all this mighty controversy about freedom of the Will and self-determining power, comes wholly to nothing; all that is contended for being no more than this, that the mind of man does what it does, and is the subject of what it is the subject, or that what is, is; wherein none has any controversy with them. Or, 2. The meaning must be, that a man has power to will as he chooses to will: that is, he has power by one act of choice to choose another; by an antecedent act of Will to choose a consequent act: and therein to execute his own choice. And if this be their meaning, it is nothing but shuffling with those they dispute with, and baffling their own reason. For still the question returns, wherein lies man’s liberty in that antecedent act of will which chose the consequent act. The answer according to the same principles must be, that his liberty in this also lies in his willing as he would, or as he chose, or agreeable to another act of choice preceding that. And so the question returns in infinitum, and the like answer must be made in infinitum: in order to support their opinion, their must be no beginning, but free acts of Will must have been chosen by foregoing free acts of will in the soul of every man, without beginning.

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