

## 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 2.

**Several supposed ways of evading the foregoing reasoning considered.**

If to evade the force of what has been observed, it should be said, that when the Arminians speak of the Will determining its own acts, they do not mean that the Will determines them by any preceding act, or that one act of the will determines another; but only that the faculty or power of Will, or the soul in the use of that power, determines its own volitions; and that it does it without any act going before the act determined; such an evasion would be full of the most gross absurdity.— I confess, it is an evasion of my own inventing; and I do not know but I should wrong the Arminians, in supposing that any of them would make use of it. Bur, it being as good a one as I can invent, I would observe upon it a few things.

First, If the power of the will determines an act of volition, or the soul in the use or exercise of that power determines it, that is the same thing as for the soul to determine volition by an act of will, For an exercise of the power of will, and an act of that power, are the same thing. therefore to say, that the power of will, or the soul in the use or exercise of that power, determines volition, without an act of will preceding the volition determined, is a contradiction.

Secondly, If a power of will determines the act of the Will, then a power of choosing determines it. For, as was before observed, in every act of will, there is choice, and a power of willing is a power of choosing. But if a power of choosing determines the act of volition, it determines it by choosing it. For it is most absurd to say, that a power of choosing determines one thing rather than another, without choosing any thing. But if a power of choosing determines volition by choosing it, then here is the act of volition determined by an antecedent choice, choosing that volition.

Thirdly, To say, that the faculty, or the soul, determines its own volition, but not by any act, is a contradiction. Because for the soul to direct, decide, or determine any thing, is to act; and this is supposed: for the soul is here spoken of as being a cause in this affair, doing something; or, which is the same thing, exerting itself in order to an effect, which effect is the determination of volition, or the particular kind and manner of an act of will. But certainly, this action is not the same with the effect, in order to the production of which it is exerted; but must be something prior to it.

The advocates for this notion of the freedom of the Will, speak of a certain sovereignty in the will, whereby it has power to determine its own volition. And therefore the determination of volition must itself be an act of the will; for otherwise it can be no exercise of that supposed power and sovereignty. Again, if the Will determines itself, then either the will is active in determining its volitions, or it is not. If active, then the determination is an act of the will; and so there is one act of the will determining another. But if the Will is not active in the determination, then how does it exercise any liberty in it? These gentlemen suppose that the thing wherein the Will exercises liberty, is in its determining its own acts. But how can this be, if it be not active in determining? Certainly the will, or the soul, cannot exercise any liberty in that wherein it doth not act, or wherein it doth not exercise itself. So that if either part of this dilemma be taken, this scheme of liberty, consisting in self-determining power, is overthrown. If there be an act of the Will in determining all its own free acts, then one free act of the Will is determined by another; and so we have the absurdity of every free act, even the very first, determined by a foregoing free act. But if there be no act or exercise of the Will in determining its own acts, then no liberty is exercised in determining them. From whence it follows, that no liberty consists in the Will's power to determine its own acts: or, which is the same thing, that there is no such thing as liberty consisting in a self-determining power of the Will.

If it should be said, That although it be true, if the soul determines its own volitions, it must be active in so doing, and the determination itself must be an act; yet there is no need of supposing this act to be prior to the volition determined; but the will or soul determines the act of the Will in willing; it determines its own volition, in the very act of volition; it directs and limits the act of the will, causing it to be so and not otherwise, in exerting the act, without any preceding act to exert that. If any should say after this manner, they must mean one of these three things: either, (1.) That the determining act, though it be before the act determined in the order of nature, yet is not before it in order of time. Or, (2.) That the determining act is not before the act determined, either in the order of time or nature, nor is truly distinct from it; but that the soul's determining the act of volition is the same thing with its exerting the act of volition: the mind's exerting such a particular act, is its causing and determining the act. Or, (3.) that volition has no cause, and is no effect; but comes into existence, with such a particular determination, without any ground or reason of its existence and determination. I shall consider these distinctly.

(1.) If all that is meant, be, that the determining act is not before the act determined in order of time, it will not help the case at all, though it should be allowed. If it be before

the determined act in the order of nature, being the cause or ground of its existence, this as much proves it to be distinct from, and independent on it, as if it were before in the order of time. As the cause of the particular motion of a natural body in a certain direction, may have no distance as to time, yet cannot be the same with the motion effected by it, but must be as distinct from it, as any other cause, that is before its effect in the order of time: as the architect is distinct from the house which he builds, or the father distinct from the son which he begets. And if the act of the Will determining be distinct from the act determined, and before it in the order of nature, then we can go back from one to another, till we come to the first in the series, which has no act of the will before it in the order of nature, determining it; and consequently is an act not determined by the will, and so not a free act, in this notion of freedom. And this being the act which determines all the rest, none of them are free acts. As when there is a chain of many links, the first of which only is taken hold of and drawn by hand; all the rest may follow and be moved at the same instant, without any distance of time; but yet the motion of one link is before that of another in the order of nature; the last is moved by the next, and that by the next, and so till we come to the first; which not being moved by any other, but by something distinct from the whole chain, this as much proves that no part is moved by any self-moving power in the chain, as if the motion of one link followed that of another in the order of time.

(2.) If any should say, that the determining act is not before the determined act, either in the order of time, or of nature, nor is distinct from it; but that the exertion of the that act is the determination of the act; that for the soul to exert a particular volition, is for it to cause and determine that act of volition: I would on this observe, that the thing in question seems to be forgotten, or kept out of sight in a darkness and unintelligibleness of speech; unless such an objector would mean to contradict himself.— The very act of volition itself is doubtless a determination of mind; i. e. it is the mind's drawing up a conclusion, or coming to a choice between two or more things proposed to it. But determining among external objects of choice, is not the same with determining the act of choice itself, among various possible acts of choice.— The question is, What influences, directs, or determines the mind or Will to come to such a conclusion or choice as it does? Or what is the cause, ground, or reason, why it concludes thus, and not otherwise? Now it must be answered, according to the Arminian notion of freedom, that the Will influences, orders, and determines itself thus to act. And if it does, I say, it must be by some antecedent act. To say, it is caused, influenced, and determined by something, and yet not determined by any thing antecedent, either in order of time or nature, is a contradiction. For that is what is meant by a thing's being prior in the order of nature, that it is someway the cause or reason of the thing, with respect to which it is said to be prior.

If the particular act or exertion of will, which comes into existence, be any thing properly determined at all, then it has some cause of existing, and of existing in such a particular determinate manner, and not another; some cause, whose influence decides the matter: which cause is distinct from the effect, and prior to it. But to say, that the Will or mind orders, influences, and determines itself to exert an act by the very exertion itself, is to make the exertion both cause and effect; or the exerting such an act, to be a cause of

the exertion of such an act. For the question is, What is the cause and reason of the soul's exerting such an act? To which the answer is, The soul exerts such an act, and that is the cause of it. And so, by this, the exertion must be distinct from, and in the order of nature prior to, itself.

(3.) If the meaning be, that the soul's exertion of such a particular act of will, is a thing that comes to pass of itself, without any cause; and that there is absolutely no reason of the soul being determined to exert such a volition, and make such a choice, rather than another; I say, if this be the meaning of Arminians, when they contend so earnestly for the Will determining its own acts, and for liberty of Will consisting in self-determining power; they do nothing but confound themselves and others with words without a meaning. In the question, What determines the will? and in their answer, that the Will determines itself; and in all the dispute, it seems to be taken for granted, that something determines the Will; and the controversy on this head is not, whether its determination has any cause or foundation at all; but where the foundation of it is, whether in the will itself, or somewhere else. But if the thing intended be what is above mentioned, then nothing at all determines the Will; volition having absolutely no cause or foundation of its existence, either within or without.— There is a great noise made about self-determining power, as the source of all free acts of the Will: but when the matter comes to be explained, the meaning is, that no power at all is the source of these acts, neither self-determining power, nor any other, but they arise from nothing; no cause, no power, no influence, being at all concerned in the matter.

However, this very thing, even that the free acts of the Will are events which come to pass without a cause, is certainly implied in the Arminian notion of liberty of Will; though it be very inconsistent with many other things in their scheme, and repugnant to some things implied in their notion of liberty. Their opinion implies, that the particular determination of volition is without any cause; because they hold the free acts of the will to be contingent events; and contingency is essential to freedom in their notion of it. But certainly, those things which have a prior ground and reason of their particular existence, a cause which antecedently determines them to be, and determines them to be just as they are, do not happen contingently. If something foregoing, by a casual influence and connexion, determines and fixes precisely their coming to pass, and the manner of it, then it does not remain a contingent thing whether they shall come to pass or no.

And because it is a question in many respects very important in this controversy, Whether the free acts of the Will are events which come to pass without a cause; I shall be particular in examining this point in the two following sections.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*. If you would like to discuss this article in our online community, please visit our [RPM Forum](#).

## Subscribe to RPM

RPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like RPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [RPM](#), please select this [link](#).