

## Freedom of the Will

[Jonathan Edwards](#)

### Part III

**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**

#### Section 7.

**Arminian notions of moral Agency inconsistent with all  
Influence of Motive and Inducement, in either virtuous or  
vicious actions.**

As Arminian notions of that liberty which is essential to virtue or vice, are inconsistent with common sense, in their being inconsistent with all virtuous or vicious habits and dispositions; so they are no less inconsistent with all influence of motives in moral actions.— Such influence equally against those notions of liberty, whether there be, previous to the act of choice, a preponderancy of the inclination, or a preponderancy of those circumstances, which have a tendency to move the inclination. And, indeed, it comes to just the same thing: to say, the circumstances of the mind are such as tend to sway and turn its inclination one way, is the same thing, as to say, the inclination of the mind, as under such circumstances, tends that way.

Or if any think it most proper to say, that Motives do alter the inclination, and give a net bias to the mind, it will not alter the case, as to the present argument. For if Motives operate by giving the mind an inclination, then they operate by destroying the mind's indifference, and laying it under a bias. But to do this, is to destroy the Arminian freedom: it is not to leave the will to its own self-determination, but to bring it into subjection to the power of something extrinsic, which operates upon it, sways and determines it, previous to its own determination. So that what is done from Motive, cannot be either virtuous or vicious. Besides, if the acts of the will are excited by Motives, those Motives are the causes of those acts of the Will; which makes the acts of the will necessary; as effects necessarily follow the efficiency of the cause. And if the influence and power of the Motive causes the volition, then the influence of the motive determines volition, and volition does not determine itself; and so is not free, in the sense of Arminians, (as has been largely shown already,) and consequently can be neither virtuous nor vicious.

The supposition which has already been taken notice of as an insufficient evasion in other cases, would be, in like manner, impertinently alleged in this case; namely, the supposition that liberty consist in a power of suspending action for the present, in order to deliberation. If it should be said, Though it be true, that the Will is under a necessity of finally following the strongest Motive; yet it may, for the present, forbear to act upon the Motive presented, till there has been opportunity thoroughly to consider it, and compare its real weight with the merit of other Motives. I answer as follows:

Here again, it must be remembered, that if determining thus to suspend and consider, be that act of the will, wherein alone liberty is exercised, then in this all virtue and vice must consist; and the acts that follow this consideration, and are the effects of it, being necessary, are no more virtuous or vicious than some good or bad events, which happen when they are fast asleep, and are the consequences of what they did when they were awake. Therefore, I would here observe two things:

1. To suppose, that all virtue and vice, in every case, consists in determining, whether to take time for consideration or not, is not agreeable to common sense, For, according to such a supposition, the most horrid crimes, adultery, murder, sodomy, blasphemy, &c. do not at all consist in the horrid nature of the things themselves, but only in the neglect of thorough consideration before they were perpetrated, which brings their viciousness to a small matter, and makes all crimes equal. If it be said, that neglect of consideration, when such heinous evils are proposed to choice, is worse than in other cases: I answer, this is inconsistent, as it supposes the very thing to be, which, at the same time, is supposed not to be; it supposes all moral evil, all viciousness and heinousness, does not consist merely in the want of consideration. It supposes some crimes in themselves, in their own nature, to be more heinous than others, antecedent to consideration, or inconsideration, which lays the person under a previous obligation to consider in some cases more than others.

2. If it were so, that all virtue and vice, in every case, consisted only in the act of the will, whereby it determines Whether to consider or no, it would not alter the case in the least, as to the present argument. For still in this act of the Will on this determination, it is induced by some Motive, and necessarily follows the strongest Motive; and so is necessarily, even in that act wherein alone it is either virtuous or vicious.

One thing more I would observe, concerning the inconsistency of Arminian notions of moral Agency with the Influence of Motives.— I suppose none will deny, that it is possible for such powerful Motives to be set before the mind, exhibited in so strong a light, and under such advantageous circumstances, as to be invincible; and such as the mind cannot but yield to. In this case, Arminians will doubtless say, liberty is destroyed. And if so, then if Motives are exhibited with half so much power, they hinder liberty in proportion to their strength, and go halfway towards destroying it. If a thousand degrees of Motive abolish all liberty, then five hundred take it half away. If one degree of the influence of motive does not at all infringe or diminish liberty, then no more do two degrees; for nothing doubled, is still nothing. And if two degrees do not diminish the Will's liberty, no more do four, eight, sixteen, or six thousand. For nothing however

multiplied comes to but nothing. If there be nothing in the nature of Motive or moral suasion, that is at all opposite to liberty, then the greatest degree of it cannot hurt liberty. But if there be somewhat, in the nature of the thing, against liberty, then the least degree of it hurts in some degree; and consequently diminishes virtue. If invincible Motives to that action which is good, take away all the freedom of the act, and so all the virtue of it; then the more forcible the Motives are, so much the worse, so much the less virtue; and the weaker the Motives are, the better for the cause of virtue; and none is best of all.

Now let it be considered, whether these things are agreeable to common sense. If it should be allowed, that there are some instances wherein the soul chooses without any motive, what virtue can there be in such a choice? I am sure there is no prudence or wisdom in it. Such a choice is made for no good end; being made for no end at all. If it were for any end, the view of the end would be the motive exciting to the act; and if the act be for no good end, and so from no good aim, then there is no good intention in it: and, therefore, according to all our natural notions of virtue, no more virtue in it than in the motion of the smoke, which is driven to and fro by the wind, without any aim or end in the thing moved, and which knows not whither, nor wherefore, it is moved.

Corol. 1. By these things it appears, that the argument against the Calvinists, taken from the use of counsels, exhortations, invitations, exhortations, &c. so much insisted on by Arminians, is truly against themselves. For these things can operate no other way to any good effect, than as in them is exhibited Motive and Inducement, tending to excite and determine the acts of the will. But it follows, on their principles, that the acts of will excited by such causes, cannot be virtuous; because, so far as they are from these, they are not from the Will's self-determining power. Hence it will follow, that it is not worth while to offer any arguments to persuade men to any virtuous volition or voluntary action; it is in vain to set before them the wisdom and amiableness of ways of virtue, or the odiousness and folly of way of vice. This notion of liberty and moral Agency frustrates all endeavours to draw men to virtue by instruction or persuasion, precept or example: for though these things may induce them to what is materially virtuous, yet at the same time they take away the form of virtue, because they destroy liberty; as they, by their own power, put the Will out of its equilibrium, determine and turn the scale, and take the work of self-determining power out of its hands. And the clearer the instructions given, the more powerful the arguments used, and the more moving the persuasions or examples, the more likely they are to frustrate their own design; because they have so much the greater tendency to put the Will out of its balance, to hinder its freedom of self-determination; and so to exclude the very form of virtue, and the essence of whatsoever is praiseworthy.

So it clearly follows, from these principles, that God has no hand in any man's virtue, nor does at all promote it, either by a physical or moral influence; that none of the moral methods he uses with men to promote virtue in the world, have any tendency to the attainment of that end; that all the instructions he has given men, from the beginning of the world to this day, by prophets or apostles, or by his Son Jesus Christ; that all his counsels, invitations, promises, threatenings, warnings, and exhortations; that all

means he has used with men, in ordinances, or providences; yea, all influences of his Spirit, ordinary and extraordinary, have had no tendency at all to excite any one virtuous act of the mind, or to promote any thing morally good and commendable, in any respect.— For there is no way that these or any other means can promote virtue, but one of these three. Either, (1.) By a physical operation on the heart. But all effects that are wrought in men in this way, have no virtue in them, by the concurring voice of all Arminians. Or, (2.) Morally, by exhibiting Motives to the understandings, to excite good acts in the Will. But it has been demonstrated, that volitions excited by Motives, are necessary, and not excited by a self-moving power; and therefore, by their principles, there is no virtue in them. Or, (3.) By merely giving the Will an opportunity to determine itself concerning the objects proposed, either to choose or reject, by its own uncaused, unmoved, uninfluenced self-determination. And if this be all, then all those means do no more to promote virtue than vice: for they do nothing but give the Will opportunity to determine itself either way, either to good or bad, without laying it under any bias to either: and so there is really as much of an opportunity given to determine in favour of evil, as of good.

Thus that horrid blasphemous consequence will certainly follow from the Arminian doctrine, which they charge on others; namely, that God acts an inconsistent part in using so many counsels, warnings, invitations, entreaties, &c. with sinners, to induce them to forsake sin, and turn to the ways of virtue; and that all are insincere and fallacious. It will follow, from their doctrine, that God does these things when he knows, at the same time, that they have no manner of tendency to promote the effect he seems to aim at; yea, knows that if they have any influence, this very influence will be inconsistent with such an effect, and will prevent it. But what an imputation of insincerity would this fix on him, who is infinitely holy and true! — So that theirs is the doctrine which, if pursued in its consequences, does horribly reflect on the Most High, and fix on him the charge of hypocrisy; and not the doctrine of the Calvinist, according to their frequent and vehement exclamations and invectives.

Corol 2. From what has been observed in this section, it again appears, that Arminian principles and notions, when fairly examined and pursued in their demonstrable consequences, do evidently shut all virtue out of the world, and make it impossible that there should ever be any such thing, in any case; or that any such thing should ever be conceived of. For, by these principles, the very notion of virtue or vice implies absurdity and contradiction. For it is absurd in itself, and contrary to common sense, to suppose a virtuous act of mind without any good intention or aim; and, by their principles, it is absurd to suppose a virtuous act with a good intention or aim; for to act for an end, is to act from a Motive. So that if we rely on these principles, there can be no virtuous act with a good design and end; and it is self-evident, there can be none without: consequently there can be no virtuous act at all.

Corol. 3. It is manifest, that Arminian notions of moral Agency, and the being of a faculty of Will, cannot consist together; and that if there can be any such thing as either a virtuous or vicious act, it cannot be an act of the Will; no Will can be at all concerned in it. For that act which is performed without inclination, without Motive, without end, must

be performed without any concern of the Will. To suppose an act of the Will without these, implies a contradiction. If the soul in its act has no motive or end; then, in that act (as was observed before) it seeks nothing, goes after nothing, exerts no inclination to any thing; and this implies, that in that act it desires nothing, and chooses nothing; so that there is no act of choice in the case: and that is as much as to say, there is no act of Will in the case. Which very effectually shuts all vicious and virtuous acts out of the universe; inasmuch as, according to this, there can be no vicious or virtuous act wherein the Will is concerned: and according to the plainest dictates of reason, and the light of nature, and also the principles of Arminians themselves, there can be no virtuous or vicious act wherein the Will is not concerned. And therefore there is no room for any virtuous or vicious acts at all.

Corol. 4. If none of the moral actions of intelligent beings are influenced by either previous inclination or motives, another strange thing will follow; and this is, that God not only cannot foreknow any of the future moral actions of his creatures, but he can make no conjecture, can give no probable guess concerning them. For all conjecture in things of this nature must depend on some discerning or apprehension of these two things, previous Disposition and Motive, which, as has been observed, Arminian notions of moral Agency, in their real consequence, altogether exclude.

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