

FREE WILL,  
PREDESTINATION  
AND DETERMINISM

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PRESS

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## CHAPTER I

### FREE WILL

#### THREE KINDS OF EVENT

##### DETERMINED, WHICH IS TO SAY PREDETERMINED, EVENTS

There is a regularity in nature. This is expressed in laws which, unlike civil laws, do not say what ought to happen but what in fact does happen. Laws which are not statistical say what necessarily happens in particular cases. For instance, the sun necessarily rose this morning here at precisely 6.23 Australian Eastern Time. Also, if I hold a cup up in the air and let go of it, it falls: I do not say that it usually falls but simply that it falls, meaning that nothing else is possible.

It is generally believed that these laws of nature are universal in both space and time, so that, for instance, scientists make calculations about the moons of Jupiter assuming that they “obey” the same laws of gravity as are applicable on our earth, and other scientists speculate about the beginning of the universe assuming that the same laws of nature applied then as apply now.

The word “necessary” now usually means necessary *for* something; for instance, we might say that to become a member of a choir it is necessary to be able to sing and it may be necessary to be able to read music. It used, however, to be used on its own, so that an event was said to be necessary if it followed necessarily from its antecedents, and the belief that *all* actions are determined or “lawful”, which is now called determinism, was called “the doctrine of philosophical necessity”. There are, however, two other kinds of event, or, at least, there are two other ideas of events.

##### RANDOM EVENTS, THINGS WHICH HAPPEN BY CHANCE

By a random event I mean, first, one which, given its antecedents, involves multiple possibility. I do not mean only that we, when we know the antecedents of an event, sometimes think that several things are possible: I mean that there is more than one possibility, whether

we know that or not. The randomness may not be total: for instance, if a stallion is mated with a mare, it may be certain that the offspring will be a foal but it may be equally possible for it to be male and for it to be female and in that respect there will be randomness. I mean, secondly, that no one chooses between the possibilities. One of them just happens. I shall have more to say about this in chapter 6.

### FREE ACTS

Free acts are the subject of this book and hence I shall be brief about them here.

To say that a person in a particular situation has free will means two things. The first is that it is possible for him to make one decision, and it is also possible for him to make at least one other decision.<sup>1</sup> He has alternatives.<sup>2</sup> If, for example, a woman has been working for one firm and is offered a position in another, to say that she has free will means, for one thing, that it is possible for her to accept the offer and it is also possible for her to refuse it.

To say that a person has free will means, second, that he or she – not anyone else but he himself or she herself – chooses to make one of the possible decisions and not any of the others. This choice occurs in consciousness: that is, it is in consciousness that persons determine their decisions or perform what is called “self-determina-

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1 Great care is needed when formulating the idea expressed here, that immediately before he makes his decision it is possible for the person to make a certain decision and it is also possible for him not to make it. If it is said that he can make or not make it, this can be taken to mean that either he is able to make it or he is able not to make it, that is, that he is able to do one or other of those things and we do not know which: this is not a statement of belief in free will. If it is said that he can make the decision and not make it, this can be taken to mean that he can do not either but both of these things, which is absurd. If it is said that he can make the decision and can not make it, this can be taken to mean that he both can and cannot do it, which is also absurd. The formulation in the text above is, I believe, unambiguous.

2 The Latin word *alter* means “the other, of two”, and certain purists use “alternative” only in this way: they do not speak of two alternatives but of something and its alternative, as in medicine and alternative medicine. Others speak of two alternatives, but never of more. I shall speak of a person having alternatives, and there may be more than two. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* says, this is justified by usage.

tion". It is impossible directly to see into another person's consciousness – we cannot, for instance, look into another person's mind and observe his or her thinking in the way that a doctor can look into another person's lungs and observe what is happening there – and therefore, while we experience our own self-determinations, we cannot directly observe anyone else's. Consequently, self-determination is often overlooked by people who approach a discussion of free will by taking the stance of observers of other people. To understand free will, however, it is essential to bear in mind that it involves not only multiple possibility but also "self-determination". I shall in this book be talking almost entirely about free will, which involves choices between known alternatives.

If the two aspects of free will are kept in mind, it is easy to tell when people believe in free will, even if they do not use the term. For instance, if someone thinks about different things which he can do, establishing a number of possibilities open to him, and if he intends to choose between them, he believes that he has free will. Similarly, when Isaiah says:

*If you are willing and obedient,  
you shall eat the good of the land;  
but if you refuse and rebel,  
you shall be devoured by the sword, (Isa 1:19-20)*

he clearly assumes, first, that his hearers are able to obey and also able to persist in rebellion; he assumes, second, that they are going to choose between these alternatives: he therefore believes in free will, though he does not say so in as many words.

By referring to the two aspects of the free act it is also possible to tell when people do not believe in free will. If people say that when we come to a moment of choice, only one decision is possible for us, they do not believe in free will; and if others say that several decisions are possible and that at the last moment God determines the one which we make, they do not believe that we have free will, either, even if they say that they do.

### THE FREE WILL DOCTRINE

The free will doctrine, loosely formulated, is that in general human beings who have reached the age of reason, and who are not suffering

from severe mental or emotional disturbance, by nature have free will with respect to their attitudes and to actions which are in their power, which they are able to think about. That is, they can usually choose to be for or against something, they can choose between action and inaction, and they can choose between different actions which are possible for them, which they can think about, at least briefly, beforehand. There are some things which people do involuntarily: for instance, we all press down on whatever we are standing or sitting on, and a person may involuntarily react in a certain way if a loud noise (say a gun going off or a plate falling and breaking) sounds near them: the clause “which they are able to think about” excludes such reactions from the assertion of free will. Also, a person who is addicted to a drug, to smoking or to alcohol may be unable to refrain from acting in accord with his or her addiction if the opportunity to do so presents itself: the words “who are not suffering from severe mental or physical disturbance” mean that such persons, in such situations, are not said to have free will.

Clearly, a free act is different from both determined and random events. The multiplicity of possibilities makes it different from a pre-determined event, and the conscious choice makes it different from a random event. Robert Kane says: “When described from a physical perspective alone, free will looks like chance”:<sup>3</sup> it is the psychological element that makes it totally different.

### **FIVE FREE ACTS**

Before analysing free will in general terms I will tell five stories about persons making free choices, so that we will know what is being analysed. I shall set them like quotations.

First, a widower lived alone in New York. His son, who had married and lived in a different city, had not kept close contact with him, but he and his daughter, who was thirty and a teacher of French, and who lived in an apartment not far away, were close. One day she returned from a trip to Europe with the news that she planned to get married to a fifty-year-old black African scientist who lived and worked in France. The father was dumbfounded. To begin with, he did not know what to *think*. It was good, in general, that his daughter was going to get married. Also, she was no fool and she had no history of falling in and out of love or of being

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3 Kane, *The Significance of Free Will*, p. 147.

attracted by unsuitable men; on the contrary, she had always been a good judge of character and emotionally balanced, so that if she wanted to marry this man he was probably right for her. On the other hand, that he should have been so much older than she was, and that they were going to live in France, seemed to the father to make the marriage highly inadvisable. He also experienced conflicting feelings. At times his love for his daughter made him feel happy for her. At other times he felt inclined to oppose the marriage because if his daughter went to live in France it would be the end of their close association, and all the pain that he felt when he lost his wife was revived in him at the prospect of losing his daughter; also, she had come to replace his wife in his emotions and he was jealous, especially since the prospective husband was almost as old as he was. Moreover, like many people of his generation he had some residual racism. All these thoughts and feelings bounced about in his agitated mind and heart, and he changed from, "She has a right to marry whomever she chooses, and she has a right to my acceptance of him, I can see that" and, "I love her, and if this is what she wants I'll accept it" to, "I don't have to accept this!" After a while he realised that he could go either way: it was possible for him to put his mind to looking at the question from the bright side, to be unselfish, and both inwardly and in his words to his daughter to accept the marriage; and it was also possible for him to look at the dark side of what was proposed, deliberately to be jealous, possessive, prejudiced and obstructive, and to oppose the marriage. After a struggle, he decided to be generous, and he accepted. Though he felt a wrench he also felt a sort of peace.

Second, a widow with children who had worked for many years in one city was offered a bigger job in another city. She asked herself, "What would be the better course of action, to accept it or not?" She noted that there was no moral obligation either way. Then she went over the reasons why it would be good to accept the job: the benefit of greater responsibility and job satisfaction, the danger of her losing interest in her work and in life if she remained where she was until retirement, and the additional money for herself and her children. She looked at the reasons for staying where she was: the psychological strain of adjusting to a new job in a new city; the pain, for every member of her family, of separation from friends; and the sheer bother of moving. She asked herself whether she had such a strong desire to go or to stay that she could never be happy if she did not go or if she went, and she found no such desire in herself. At this point, then, she judged that it would be

good for some reasons and motives to take the job and good for other reasons and motives to refuse it, and that neither to go nor to stay was the only right thing to do. She knew, too, that she had enough courage and enterprise to be psychologically capable of accepting the offer; on the other hand, it was not irresistible: that is, both courses of action were possible in every way. After a week of turning the alternatives over in her mind, after long talks with her children and close friends, and a walk in the country, she made her decision and took the job.

Third, a woman of twenty-three had graduated from university, had a good job and looked forward to a career. What she hoped was that she would establish herself and then, when she was about thirty, get married and have children. She met a single man of thirty-five, they fell in love and he asked her to marry him. She saw three possibilities: get married soon and have children, as he would like; get married soon and put off having children until she was in her thirties; say “No” to the proposal. She saw that everything depended on her emotions and she decided to prefer her love for the man, and his happiness, to her desire for six years as a single woman advancing in a career: they got married, and expected to become parents fairly soon.

Fourth, a man with cancer had learned that he was almost certainly going to die in a few months time. At first he could not believe this, and he said that somewhere in the world there must be a doctor who could cure him, but after a time he mentally gave in and took it to be a fact that he was going to die. He did not, however, want to die and he was bitter and angry. Then, after a time, he saw that he had a choice: he could either continue to refuse to accept death and as it were “go down fighting”, or he could accept it and die peacefully. After a struggle, and a period of depression, he chose to accept death, and from then on had inner peace.

Fifth, A. E. Ellis (a pseudonym) has written a novel, *The Rack*, which seems to be autobiographical, about a young man in a T.B. sanatorium in France who saw that it was possible for him to leave and also possible for him to stay. He knew that on Christmas Eve the staff and the other patients would be occupied and that he would be left alone for a long time. He said to himself:

After all, I am free. If I stay here and accept treatment, it is [will be] of my own volition. If I decide that I don't wish it, I have

only to explain to Dr Vernet, and then pack my bags. The worst I have to fear is death, which, after all, is always inevitable. On the other hand, if I stay and agree to undergo whatever treatment is proposed, I can regard it dispassionately, almost in the light of an experiment which I myself am making. All that matters is that it should be I who consciously make the choice: on Christmas Eve, when completely alone, I shall weigh up the alternatives and decide.<sup>4</sup>

### THE PRECONDITION: MULTIPLE POSSIBILITY

In each of the above stories, more than one option is possible. For instance, it is possible for the woman in the second story to accept the offer and move, and it is also possible for her to refuse it and stay where she is. It is possible for the woman in the third story to say to the man: “I do not want to get married yet and so I will say ‘No’ to your proposal. For your sake, I hope that you will find a woman who is willing to marry you, now”.

Every option must be intrinsically possible. Consider this story:

A man went to an architect and said that he had bought a block of land, of such and such dimensions, and that he wanted to build on it a single-storey house, with certain rooms, the dimensions of each of which he gave. The architect said, “The areas of the rooms, added together, come to more than that of the block of land; it is, therefore, impossible to build the house which you have described on the block which you have bought”. The man said, “You mean you cannot design the house I want, so I will try another architect”, to which the architect replied: “The problem is not my lack of skill; no architect on earth could help you; it just cannot be done”.

The architect can choose between different ways of dealing with the client, but obviously there is no choice between building and not building the house, because it is just not possible to build it. Also, I shall assume here that it is not merely technologically beyond us but intrinsically impossible to change the past. Someone writing a novel set in the thirties can write that a man bought a car in 1930 and later, when he comes to 1939, return to what he had written earlier and change it. Also, suppose that a director, the author and some actors are rehearsing a play about a man who opposes his daughter’s mar-

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<sup>4</sup> Ellis, *The Rack*, p. 55.

riage to an Asian for two acts and then, in Act III, gives in. The actor who is playing him may say, when they are rehearsing Act III, that it would help him if in Act I he had had an accident and been helped by an Asian doctor. This suggestion can be accepted by the author, in which case the suggestion is written into the script and, when the incident occurs in Act I, it may seem pointless to the audience but it will help them to understand the man's change of heart later, in Act III. If, however, an author is writing about actual events, he can mention them or not but he cannot alter the fact that they happened.

Moreover, each option must be possible *for the person concerned*, so that multiple possibility does not mean unlimited possibility. Obviously, what is possible for a person at any moment is limited by external factors: one cannot fly from Melbourne to London in one hour, a person with fifty thousand dollars cannot buy a house worth a million, and some people in gaols and asylums are constrained by walls. Also, what we can do is limited by factors within us: some people cannot sing, some people cannot do mathematics beyond simple arithmetic, and man might say: "Try as I might, I simply cannot like my fiancée's brother – I can't help it, he gets on my nerves". All that the exercise of free will presupposes is that in a particular case the options are not limited to one.<sup>5</sup>

Also, multiple possibility does not mean equal moral goodness, reasonableness or attractiveness of all possibilities:

- First, we are not always, and necessarily, morally good persons. It is possible for a person to see clearly that an attitude or action would be immoral, and nevertheless choose it.

- Second, we do not necessarily choose what seems to us to be, from a rational point of view, the best (the definition of man as "a rational animal" does not mean that we always act rationally).<sup>6</sup> It would be possible for the man in the TB sanatorium to judge that it would be most practical for him to stay there – he could say to

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<sup>5</sup> If something cannot be altered or prevented, a person can still choose what attitude to take towards it. This is the case of the man with cancer in the story above.

<sup>6</sup> Wojtyła says that it is sometimes maintained that a person necessarily chooses whatever seems to him or her to be the greatest good; a person, according to this theory, can choose a lesser good, but only if it seems to be the greater. This, he says, is false. (*The Acting Person*, pp. 133-134.)



himself, “If someone else were in this situation, I would say to him, ‘It’s your choice, but it would be better for you to stay’” – and still be able to leave. It is often said that the object of the will is “the good”; even if that is true, it is not “the best”.

- Third, we do not necessarily choose what we emotionally prefer. If the widow in my second story feels emotionally drawn towards staying where she is, she is still capable of leaving, and at times people say to one another: “You can’t always do what you feel like doing, you must be practical”. What I call “multiple possibility” is often called “indifference”: this word usually means the absence of any preference or emotional leaning one way or the other and I do not use it because free will is often exercised where a strong preference exists so that the person is anything but indifferent, in the ordinary sense of the word. As I hope my examples have made clear, many decisions are not approached in a cold, rational way, but neither are they determined by this or that emotion.

- Fourth, when practical considerations are leading us to choose one thing and our emotional preference is to choose another, or when there is conflict between different practical or other considerations, or emotions, what we choose is not determined by whatever of these is the most strong. It is not as though we are capable of choosing either way only when the various influences on us are evenly balanced.

- Fifth, a person does not necessarily choose according to his or her psychological type. According to the Myers-Briggs classification, which has sixteen basic types, one kind of person tends to shun disagreements. If such a person loves the music of Bartok and hears someone say that there is no good twentieth-century music, instead of saying, “But surely Bartok is a great composer”, as anyone else who appreciated Bartok would do, this person tends to let it pass. But to speak up for Bartok would not be impossible. Similarly – and here I move from psychological type to moral character – if a person is of a generous disposition he or she does not necessarily help you if you need help, and a mean man can surprise everyone, including himself, by being generous for once. A dishonest person is not entitled to say: “Don’t expect me to tell the truth. I can’t. I’m dishonest”.

- Sixth, unconscious factors do not determine our choices, though they may influence them. If I have to make a certain choice, unconscious factors may make me feel inclined to choose in a particular way, without knowing why, or they may cause me to look for reasons for making that choice; but, except in the case of compulsive behaviour which springs from “severe mental or emotional disturbance”, they do not make anything else impossible.

- Seventh, either nature or nurture or both may limit our possibilities and cause us to have certain tendencies, but neither determines all our choices: whatever genes I have inherited, and whatever environment I have lived in, I am often in situations in which I am both capable of choosing this and capable of choosing that.

To sum up, a person at a crossroads can feel pulled by something along one of the roads, or he can feel that something inside him is pushing him in a particular direction, but it is still possible for him to go either way. I conclude by saying that multiple possibility is not the essence of free will, as it is also found in random events. For this reason, when scientists affirm the Principle of Indeterminacy, they do not implicitly affirm free will.

### **THE POSSIBILITY OF A WILL TO EVIL**

Scholastic authors maintained that what they called the “formal object” of the will is “the good”, so that a thing can be willed only in so far as it is judged to be good. This means that if something appears to us to be good without qualification or limitation, it would be impossible for us not to will it, which means that we *necessarily* will to be happy. This means that we have free will only with respect to what they call “particular goods”, which they define as things which are good only in certain respects. I believe, however, that it is possible for a person to reject the good and happiness – for example, if a person believes that he can be rich, powerful and unhappy or else poor, weak and happy, he can choose wealth and power, not happiness – and a person can will his or her own destruction and misery.

### **THE PHASES OF A DECISION**

Making a decision involves two phases, and if a free act involves a physical action, there is a third phase, the action. I will here say

briefly what these phases are, and go into more detail in chapters 18-21.

#### **THE FIRST PHASE: MAKING THE JUDGEMENT OR JUDGEMENTS**

By a judgement I mean an intellectual act in which a person says, in his or her mind and perhaps also aloud, something which he or she believes to be true. For instance, a few minutes ago I heard a noise on my window and said to myself, “It is raining”, believing that rain was falling outside: that was a judgement. Other judgements which I have made are: “Shakespeare was a greater dramatist than Molière”, “Human beings have evolved from beasts” and “Life is not absurd” – all those being things which I believe to be true. Judgements are expressed in propositions, but, as we shall soon see, not all propositions express judgements.

No one can decide to do something which he or she believes to be impossible. For instance, because we all know that it is impossible for us to jump three metres in the air, none of us can decide to do that. We can decide to *try* to do it, but trying to do it, as distinct from doing it, is possible; we can say to ourselves the words, “I will now jump three metres in the air”, but as we say them we know that we do not mean them (try it and see); if we mistakenly thought that we could jump three metres we could decide to do it: but it is quite impossible to know that something is impossible and decide to do it. Therefore, to exercise free will a person must – unless it is obvious – make judgements of possibility. In the four stories which I told, the man with cancer is capable of accepting death, and also capable of defiantly refusing to accept it, and the man in the sanatorium clearly establishes that he is able to stay and also able to leave: those are their alternatives.

In the first phase the person considers the alternatives and makes judgements about them. He may see, or think he sees, that one course of action is morally obligatory, in which case the final judgement might be, for instance: “I am morally obliged to pay”, He may judge that one course (which is not immoral) is the only sensible one, or the only one which is emotionally “right”. Alternatively, he may make different positive judgements about several of the alternatives, saying, for instance, that to take a certain job would have these advantages and those disadvantages, while to take another job instead

would have different advantages and disadvantages. The judgements made by the man in the sanatorium are of this kind.

#### **THE SECOND PHASE: CHOOSING, OR MAKING THE DECISION**

In the second phase, the person makes his or her decision or choice. In the stories which I told, the father decides to accept his daughter's marriage, the woman decides to take the job, the woman decides to get married and have children, the man with cancer decides to accept death and on Christmas Eve the man with T.B. is going to decide whether or not to remain in the sanatorium. As I said, even when the first phase ends with a clear and certain judgement to the effect that one alternative is the only one which is not immoral, or that one is best on either rational or emotional grounds, the person does not necessarily choose it. Therefore it is not as though when one makes a judgement the decision follows automatically from it. The decision is a highly significant act in its own right.

A person makes a decision by saying in his or her mind words such as "I accept the situation", "I'll take the job", "I accept death", "I'll marry him" or "I will leave this sanatorium". These are propositions, but they do not express judgements because in uttering them the person does not say something which he or she believes to be true: they are what have been called performative utterances like "I promise to come" or the word "Yes" said when a vote is taken. Suppose that a woman is buying a television set and asks the salesman if it will bring in a certain channel, and the salesman answers, "Yes, it will"; and suppose that, later, the salesman asks her, "Will you buy it?" and, making her decision there and then, she answers, "Yes, I will". The salesman's "It will" expresses a judgement, whereas the woman's "I will" expresses a both a decision and her entry into an agreement with the salesman. (The words do not mean: "I believe it to be true that I am going to buy this set".) Similarly, when the widow in the story which I told earlier says to herself, "I'll take the job", she is not making a prediction, which is a kind of *judgement*: she is ending her deliberation by making a *decision*. Her utterance of these words in her mind is performative.

**THE THIRD PHASE: THE ACTION**

When there is question of deciding whether or not to perform some action, there is a third phase: the action itself, or the inaction.

**THE PERSON**

During all this time I have been talking about “a person” making a decision and the question can be asked: what is meant by “a person”? This is one of those basic words like “time” which everyone uses and understands, but which are difficult to define. As some ancient authors said, a person is a *who* or a *someone*; also, a person is an individual existing intellectual being, taken as a whole. A person is also a self.

This last word is important. Since I do not have direct control over the beating of my heart I can talk about it as if it were distinct from myself and say, for instance, that my heart is beating rapidly. I cannot, however, attribute decision-making to an organ in myself that is distinct from me and say, for instance, that my brain decided that I would go to Sydney. Some authors maintain that the human brain is a computer, with a program which is partly inbuilt and partly the result of input which it has received in the course of its owner’s life. According to these authors, if someone asks me to dinner next Thursday the request goes into my brain, which has my preferences in it and also my information and commitments; either at once or after a delay, while the brain does its work, out pops the answer, “Yes”, “No”, or “What about some other time?” What is missing from this picture is the person, who is not the brain or any part of it, or a little entity somewhere inside it, which controls his or her decision-making.

**THE CAUSAL SELF-SUFFICIENCY OF THE DECISION**

There exist what I might call causal chains in which, for instance, a leaking pipe causes water to accumulate under a floor, the water causes insulation to rot, wires touch, there is a spark which causes a fire and the fire destroys a precious painting. Here each event follows necessarily from what happened before it, as in falling dominos. If, later, someone sets out to find the explanation of what happened to the painting, he works upstream through the chain of events and when he finds the leaking pipe he may say, “What caused this pipe

to leak?” and so pursue a second line of causes. If there is a free act in a series of events, at that point more than one thing could have happened, someone made a choice, set the direction of the series and was to some extent a beginning, not a link in a chain of necessary causes. If, then, searching for an explanation of something, we work our way upstream along a causal chain and come to a free act, we do not simply continue on through it: we have found a cause of what happened. As A. Seth Pringle-Pattison said, in the case of a free act the person is “the source of the action: we cannot go behind him and treat him as a thoroughfare through which certain forces operate and contrive to produce a particular result”.<sup>7</sup>

#### **AFTER THE DECISION**

After a person has made a decision, he or she has a certain attitude, such as acceptance of coming death, or an intention to perform an action or actions. If the decision is about actions, these follow, sometimes immediately – when we are talking, for instance, we no sooner decide to say something than we find ourselves saying it – and sometimes later. Sometimes only one action follows; at other times, from one decision flow many actions; indeed, from a single decision made by one person may come thousands of actions of hundreds of people.

Before a decision is made, several things are possible and none is actual; after it, one is actual and the others are no longer possible, in the sense that it is not possible for them to have been chosen in that particular decision.

Some actions are irreversible: for instance, if someone tells a secret, nothing will make the information secret again. Other actions are reversible, not in the sense that one can cause them not to have happened but in the sense that one can cancel their effects: for instance, one can hang a picture on one’s wall, then change one’s mind, take it down and put another in its place. If one makes a decision, nothing can change the fact that one made it, but at a future time one can change one’s attitude: for instance, if the man in my first example were to decide not to accept his daughter’s marriage, it would be possible for him later to change his attitude and accept it; if one has

<sup>7</sup> Seth Pringle-Pattison, *The Idea of God in the Light of Recent Philosophy*, p. 292.

decided to do something and not yet done it, one can change one's mind and not do it; more significantly, after one has done something which cannot be undone, one can change one's attitude and wish that one had not done it.

### FREE WILL AND MORALITY

It is surely clear that no one can be morally obliged to do something which is quite impossible for him. Hence if we say that someone is morally obliged to do something, we assume that it is possible for him to do it: that is, "ought to" presupposes "able to". It is only slightly less obvious that if someone cannot help doing something, it does not make sense to say that he is morally obliged to do it: for instance, it would not make sense to say that we are morally obliged to grow older. That is, "ought to" presupposes "able not to". When, therefore, we affirm or assume the existence of morality we presuppose that human beings have free will. I shall return to this question later and discuss attempts which have been made to attribute meaning to "ought" statements, and even to affirm the existence of moral obligations, when free will is denied.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, free will and morality are not so closely linked that every exercise of free will is a choice between something morally good and something morally bad, as seems to be implied when it is said that "free will is the power to do as we should" or when it is defined as the power to choose between good and evil. The choice between moral good and moral evil is a very important kind of free choice, but many important decisions are made between alternatives all of which are morally good.<sup>9</sup>

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8 See below, p. 170.

9 Bonhoeffer says that it is one of the great follies of certain moralists that they maintain the fiction that at every moment of his or her life a person must make a final and infinite choice, a conscious decision between good and evil. Certainly, he says, there are times when people make such choices, but it is important to understand that these are particular times, not all of life; otherwise, he says, there is "that unhealthy takeover of life by the ethical, that abnormal fanatisising, that total moralising of life, which leads to a constant stream of judging or exhorting comments, to interfering, and to an unsolicited meddling with the activities of concrete life that are not governed by fundamental principles" (*Ethics*, p. 366).

**WHY I CHOSE THE EXAMPLES ABOVE**

A general rule of scientific method is: Start with simple cases. I have seen a lecturer on free will observe this rule by saying: “For example, when I put out my arm like this” – here he raised his right arm to shoulder height – “I can raise or lower it”, and I have heard of empirical studies of free will in which a lot of people were brought into a room and each was given a card with three squares on it and told to choose a square, any square, and put a cross on it. To understand free will, however, it is necessary to study decisions which matter because significant differences exist between the alternatives. My examples are of this kind.

**A FINAL OBSERVATION**

I have been talking about the free will *doctrine* for want of a better word. I would call it a theory if that did not suggest, to people unfamiliar with the way the word is used in science, that it is uncertain. It is sometimes called “libertarianism” as opposed to determinism, but that word is used in a general way for the promotion of liberty and even of licence or anarchy. By using the word “doctrine” I may suggest to some people that it is a religious belief, but I will take that risk. I do not mean to imply that it cannot be proved.