

Freedom of the Will

A Careful and Strict Inquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of that Freedom of the Will
which is Supposed to be Essential to Moral Agency, Virtue and Vice, Reward and Punishment,
Praise and Blame

Jonathan Edwards

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[Brackets] enclose editorial explanations. Small ·dots· enclose material that has been added, but can be read as though it were part of the original text. Occasional •bullets, and also indenting of passages that are not quotations, are meant as aids to grasping the structure of a sentence or a thought. Every four-point ellipsis indicates the omission of a brief passage that seems to present more difficulty than it is worth. Larger omitted passages are reported on between brackets, in normal-sized type.—Edwards's discussions of and quotations from Biblical passages are omitted, as they add nothing to the book's *philosophical* value. Those omissions are signposted as they occur.

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Contents

Part I: Terms and Topics that will come up in the rest of the work	1
Section 1: The nature of the will	1
Section 2: Determination of the will	2
Section 3: The meanings of ‘necessary’, ‘impossible’, ‘unable’ etc., and of ‘contingent’	7
Section 4: The division of necessity and inability into <i>natural</i> and <i>moral</i>	12
Section 5: The notions of liberty and moral agency	17
Part 2: The freedom of will that the Arminians think is the essence of the liberty of moral agents: Does it exist?	
Could it exist? Is it even conceivable?	19
Section 1: The Arminian notion of liberty of will as consisting in the will’s self-determining power—its obvious inconsistency	19
Section 2: Two attempted escapes from the foregoing reasoning	20
Section 3: Can volition occur without a cause? Can <i>any</i> event do so?	22
Section 4: Can volition occur without a cause because the soul is active?	26
Section 5: Even if the things said in these attempted escapes were true, they are quite irrelevant and can’t help the cause of Arminian liberty; so that Arminian writers have to talk inconsistently	28
Section 6: What determines the will in cases where the mind sees the options as perfectly indifferent?	30
Section 7: The view that freedom of the will consists in indifference	33
Section 8: The view that freedom of the will rules out every kind of necessity	38
Section 9: How acts of the will connect with dictates of the understanding	39
Section 10: Volition necessarily connected with the influence of motives; criticisms of Chubb’s doctrines and arguments concerning freedom of the will	43
Section 11: The evidence that God has certain foreknowledge of the volitions of moral agents	47
Section 12: God can’t have certain foreknowledge of the future volitions of moral agents if they are contingent in a way that excludes all necessity	52
Section 13: Even if the volitions of moral agents are not connected with anything antecedent, they must be ‘necessary’ in a sense that overthrows Arminian liberty	58
Part 3: The kind of liberty of will that Arminians believe in: is it necessary for moral agency, virtue and vice, praise and dispraise etc.?	61
Section 1: God’s moral excellence is necessary, yet virtuous and praiseworthy	61

Section 2: The acts of the will of Jesus Christ's human soul were necessarily holy, yet truly virtuous, praiseworthy, rewardable etc.	62
Section 3: Moral necessity and inability are consistent with blameworthiness. This is shown by the case of people whom God has given up to sin, and of fallen man in general	67
Section 4: Command, and the obligation to obey, are consistent with moral inability to obey	71
Section 5: A close look at the <i>sincerity</i> of desires and attempts, which is supposed to excuse the non-performance of things that are good in themselves	77
Section 6: Liberty of indifference, rather than being required for virtue, is inconsistent with it. 'More generally', 'liberty' and 'moral agency' on the Arminian pattern are inconsistent with any habits' or inclinations' being virtuous or vicious	81
Section 7: Arminian notions of moral agency are inconsistent with all influence of motive and inducement in both virtuous and vicious actions	86
Part 4: Examining the main reasons the Arminians give for their view about liberty, moral agency etc. and against the opposite doctrine	90
Section 1: What makes dispositions of the heart and acts of the will vicious or virtuous is not their cause but their nature	90
Section 2: The falseness and inconsistency of the metaphysical notion of action and agency that most defenders of the Arminian doctrine of liberty, moral agency, etc. seem to have	92
Section 3: Why some people think it contrary to common sense to suppose that necessary actions can be worthy of either praise or blame	97
Section 4: 'Moral necessity is consistent with praise and blame, reward and punishment'—this squares with common sense and men's natural notions	100
Section 5: Two objections considered: the 'no use trying' objection and (near the end) the 'mere machines' objection .	104
Section 6: The objection that the doctrine defended here agrees with Stoicism and with the opinions of Hobbes	108
Section 7: The necessity of God's will	109
Section 8: Discussion of further objections against the moral necessity of God's volitions	115
Section 9: The objection that the doctrine maintained here implies that God is the author of sin	120
Section 10: Sin's first entrance into the world	126
Section 11: A supposed inconsistency between these principles and God's moral character	127
Section 12: A supposed tendency of these principles to atheism and immoral behaviour	129
Section 13: The objection that the arguments for Calvinism are metaphysical and abstruse	131

Part I: Terms and Topics that will come up in the rest of the work

Section 1: The nature of the will

You may think that there is no great need to take trouble to define or describe the will, because the word ‘will’ is generally as well understood as any other words we might use to explain it. You would be right if it weren’t for the fact that scientists, philosophers, and polemical preachers have thrown the will into darkness by the things they have said about it. But that *is* the fact; so I think it may be of some use, and will increase my chances of being clear throughout this book, if I say a few things concerning it.

Well, then: setting aside metaphysical subtleties, the will is *that by which the mind chooses anything*. The •faculty of the will is the power of, or source in, the mind by which it is capable of choosing; an •act of the will is an act of choosing or choice.

If you think the will is better defined by saying that it is that by which the soul either chooses *or refuses*, I’ll settle for that; though I don’t think we *need* to add ‘or refuses’, for in every act of will the mind chooses one thing *rather than another*; it chooses something rather than the absence or non-existence of that thing. So in every act of •refusal the mind •chooses the absence of the thing refused, so that refusing is just a special case of choosing. . . . So that whatever names we give to the act of the will—

‘choosing’, ‘refusing’, ‘approving’, ‘disapproving’, ‘liking’, ‘disliking’, ‘embracing’, ‘rejecting’, ‘determining’, ‘directing’, ‘commanding’, ‘forbidding’, ‘inclining’, ‘being averse to’, ‘being pleased with’, ‘being displeased with’

—they all come down to *choosing*. . . . Locke says: ‘The will

signifies nothing but a power or ability to prefer or choose.’ On the previous page he says: ‘The word “preferring” seems best to express the act of volition’, but then he adds that ‘it doesn’t express it precisely; for although a man would •prefer flying to walking, who can say he ever •wills to fly?’ This example doesn’t prove that there is anything to •willing other than merely •preferring. Bear in mind that the immediate object of the will with respect to a man’s walking (or any other external action) is *not* moving from one place to another on the earth or through the air; these are *more distant* objects of preference. The *immediate* object is this or that exertion of himself—for example, trying to move his legs, setting himself to move his legs, willing to move his legs. The *next to immediate* thing that is chosen or preferred when a man wills to walk is not •arriving at his chosen destination but •his legs and feet moving in a way that will get him there. And his willing this alteration in his body right now is simply his choosing or preferring that alteration in his body right now, or his liking it better than its non-occurrence. And God has constructed human nature in such a way that when a soul is united to a body that is in good condition, •the soul’s preferring or choosing such an immediate alteration of the body is instantaneously followed by •the alteration’s occurring. When I walk, all that I am conscious of happening in my mind are •my moment-by-moment preferences or choices of such-and-such alterations of my external sensations and motions, together with •moment-by-moment expectations that what I choose will indeed happen—because I have always found in the past that when I have immediately preferred *those* sorts of sensations and motions, they always actually occur straight away. But it isn’t like that with

flying. It may be said that a man remotely chooses or prefers flying; but given his view of his situation he doesn't prefer or desire any immediate movements of his limbs in order to fly, because he doesn't *expect to get* the desired end—namely, his flying—by any such movements, and he doesn't prefer or incline towards *any* bodily movements that he thinks will be entirely in vain. Thus, if we carefully distinguish the proper objects of the various acts of the will in cases like these, we won't find any difference between volition and preference; i.e. we won't find that a man's •choosing, liking best, or being pleased with something are different from his •willing it. Thus we often report an act of the will by saying 'It pleases him to' do such-and-such; and in ordinary talk there is no difference between 'He does what he wills' and 'He does what he pleases'.

Locke says:

The will is entirely distinct from desire. It can happen that an action that our will gets us to perform is contrary to our desire. A man whom I must obey may require me to use persuasions to someone else, and it may be that at the very time I am speaking I want the persuasion to fail. In this case it is plain the will and desire run counter to one another. (*Essay* II.xxi.30)

I don't assume that 'will' and 'desire' mean exactly the same: it seems that 'desire' has to do with something absent, whereas 'will' can *also* cover things that are present: I may prefer to be, as indeed I *am*, sitting here with my eyes open, •but we wouldn't say that I 'desire' it. But I can't think that 'will' and 'desire' are so entirely distinct that they can ever properly be said to go against each other. No-one *ever* wills anything contrary to his desires, or desires anything contrary to his will; and Locke's example gives no proof to the contrary. A man may for some reason say things that will tend to persuade his hearer, and yet desire that they not

persuade him; but in this situation his will and his desire don't conflict at all: what he wills is exactly what he desires; in no respect does he will one thing and desire its contrary. Locke in his example doesn't attend carefully observed to *what* is willed and *what* is desired; if he had, he'd have found that will and desire don't clash in the least. What the man wills is •to utter certain words, and his reason for willing to utter them stop him from desiring not to utter them: all things considered, he chooses to utter those words and doesn't desire not to utter them. As for the thing that Locke speaks of as desired—namely •that the words should not be effectual—his will is not contrary to this; he doesn't will that they be effectual, but rather wills that they should not, which is what he desires. . . . The same holds for Locke's other example, of a man's desiring to be eased of pain etc.

I shan't spend longer on the question of whether desire = will, whether preference = volition. I hope you'll agree with the following. In every act of will there is an act of choice; in every volition there is a preference or prevailing inclination of the soul which at that moment takes the soul out of a state of perfect indifference with respect to the immediate object of the volition. . . . Where there is absolutely no preferring or choosing—where there is nothing but an ongoing perfect equilibrium—there is no volition.

Section 2: Determination of the will

[The word 'determine' and its relatives will occur often, starting now. It can't be systematically replaced by something more familiar. The basic idea that it conveys is that of *settling* something, *fixing* it, or the like. In an example that Edwards gives, to 'determine the motion' of something is to make it go in that direction, to settle which of its possible directions it will go in. When 'determination' can satisfactorily be replaced by 'resolve' or 'decision', as on page 32, that replacement is made.] If the phrase

‘determining the will’ is to be used with any meaning, it must be

causing it to be the case that the act of the will, or the choice, should be thus and not otherwise:

and the will is said to be ‘determined’ when

some event or influence causes its choice to be directed to and fixed upon a particular end.

As when we speak of the ‘determination of motion’, meaning causing the motion of the body to be in this direction rather than that. The determination of the will involves an •effect, which must have a •cause. If the will is determined, something must determine it. This is part of what ‘determination’ means, even for those who say that *The will determines itself*. If it does, then *it* is both determiner and determined; it is a •cause that acts and has an •effect on itself, and is the object of its own influence and action.

With respect to the great question ‘What determines the will?’, there is no need now to go into a tedious study of all the various answers that have been given to it; nor do I need here to go into details of the disputes about that other ·related· question ‘Does the will always follow the last dictate of the understanding?’ All I need to say for my purposes is this: *What determines the will is the motive that the mind views as the strongest*. But perhaps I should explain my meaning a little.

By ‘motive’ I mean the whole of whatever it is—whether it’s one thing or many things acting together as one complex motive—that moves, excites, or invites the mind to ·perform an act of· volition. . . .

Whatever is a ‘motive’ (in this sense) ·for a person· must be something that that person’s understanding or perceiving faculty has in its view. Nothing can encourage or invite the mind to will or act in any way except to the extent that it is perceived or is somehow in the mind’s view; for what is out

of the mind’s view can’t affect the mind at all. . . .

And I don’t think it can be denied that anything that is properly called a ‘motive’—anything that induces or arouses a perceiving willing agent to act in some specific way—has some tendency to move or arouse the will on the way to the effect. [Edwards writes ‘. . . tendency or *advantage* to move . . .’ etc. He seems to mean that the motive (a) tends to etc. or (b) is especially well placed to etc. In future occurrences of this sort, the word ‘advantage’ will be allowed to stand.] Instances of such tendency or advantage can differ from one another in kind and in degree. A motive’s tendency to move the will is what I call its ‘strength’: the •strongest motive is the one that •appears most inviting, and •is viewed by the person’s mind in such a way as to have the greatest degree of tendency to arouse and induce the choice; a •weaker motive is one that has a •lesser degree of previous advantage or tendency to move the will—i.e. that appears less inviting to the mind in question. Using the phrase in this sense, I take it that **the will is always determined by the strongest motive**.

Something that exists in the view of a mind gets its strength, tendency, or advantage to move or excite the will from many features of

- the nature and circumstances of the thing that is viewed,
- the nature and circumstances of the viewing mind, and
- the intensity of the view, and its type.

It would perhaps be hard to make a complete list of these. But there can’t be any controversy about this general fact: if something *x* has the nature and influence of a motive to volition or choice for some thinking and willing agent, *x* is considered or viewed ·by that agent· as **good**; and *how much* tendency *x* has to get the soul to choose to pursue it is proportional to *how good* *x* appears to the soul. If you

deny this, you'll have to accept that x's appearance tends to invite or persuade the soul to *desire* x through some means other than *appearing desirable* to x. [Edwards puts this in terms of getting the soul to 'elect' x through something other than appearing 'eligible'.] It must be true in some sense that •the will is always as •the greatest apparent good is. But if you are to understand this correctly, there are two things you must get clear about.

(1) You must know what I mean by 'good'—namely, the same as 'agreeable'. To 'appear good to the mind', as I use the phrase, is to appear agreeable to the mind or to seem pleasing to it. If something x is considered as evil or disagreeable, it won't appear inviting and desirable to the mind, tending to get it to want and choose x; it won't even appear to the mind as 'indifferent' in the sense of being neither agreeable nor disagreeable. If x is to draw the inclination and move the will, it must be seen as something that suits the mind. Thus, the thing that is viewed by the mind as •having the greatest tendency to attract and engage it is the thing that •suits the mind best and pleases it most—and is *in that sense* the greatest apparent good. To deny that what draws the will is the greatest apparent good is near enough to an outright contradiction.

[We are about to encounter the word 'evil', which is used nearly two hundred times in this book. Edwards uses it to mean the same as 'bad', not necessarily *extremely* bad, which is how we use it today. There is a reason why 'evil' isn't replaced by 'bad' throughout this version: Edwards often uses 'evil' as a noun ('avoiding evil'), and it isn't natural to use 'bad' as a noun in that way ('avoiding bad').] The word 'good' in this sense also covers the removal or avoiding of evil or of whatever is disagreeable and unpleasing. It is agreeable and pleasing to •avoid what is disagreeable and unpleasing and to •have uneasiness removed. This brings in what Locke thinks determines the will. He says that what determines

the will is 'uneasiness', by which he must mean that when anyone performs a volition or act of preference, his end or aim is to avoid or remove that uneasiness; which is the same as choosing and seeking what is more easy and agreeable.

(2) When I say that . . . volition has always for its object the thing that appears most agreeable, take careful note—to avoid confusion and needless objections—that I'm speaking of the *direct and immediate* object of the act of volition, and not some indirect and remote upshot of the act of will. Many acts of volition lead *eventually* to something different from the thing that is most immediately willed and chosen. For example, when a drunkard has his liquor before him and has to choose whether or not to drink it, the immediate possible upshots that his will is taking account of are his own acts in drinking or not drinking the liquor, and he will certainly choose according to what presents itself to his mind as over-all the more agreeable. . . .

But there are also more remote upshots of this act of volition, pairs of possible outcomes that are less directly settled by this present choice, such as:

- the present pleasure the man expects by drinking,
- and •the future misery that he thinks will be the consequence of his drinking.

He may think that this future misery, when it comes, will be more disagreeable and unpleasant than refraining from drinking now would be. But in approaching this present act of volition, he is not choosing between these two things—

- near-future discomfort? or remote-future misery?.

The act of will we are talking about involves a different choice: drink now? or not drink now?

If he wills to drink, then *drinking* is the proper object of the act of his will; something makes drinking now appear more agreeable to him and to suit him better than not drinking now. If he chooses to refrain, then *not drinking*

is the immediate object of his will and is more pleasing to him than drinking. If in his choice he prefers a present pleasure to a future advantage that he thinks would be greater when it came, then a lesser present pleasure appears more agreeable to him than a greater advantage further off. If on the contrary a future advantage is preferred, then that appears most agreeable and suits him best. And so still the present volition is as the greatest apparent good at present is.

There are two ways of expressing the thesis I have been defending. There's the one I have used:

- (a) The will always **is as** the greatest apparent good, or
he will always **is as** what appears most agreeable.

And there is the one I have chosen not to use:

- (b) The will is always **determined by** the greatest apparent good, or
The will is always **determined by** what appears most agreeable.

I have used (a) because appearing most agreeable to the mind and being preferred by the mind seem to be scarcely distinct (and if x is almost the same thing as y , it is better to say ' x is as y ' than to say ' x is determined by y '). . . . I like to say that volition itself is always determined by whatever it is in or about the mind's view of the object that causes it to appear most agreeable. I say 'in or about the mind's view of the object' because the influences that make an object agreeable are not confined to what appears in the object as viewed, but also include how it is viewed and the state and circumstances of the viewing mind. To enumerate all those influences in detail would be a hard task, and might require a book to itself. My present purpose doesn't require this, so I shall confine myself to some general points.

- (1) When someone is considering whether to choose to

pursue some state of affairs S , how agreeable S appears to him to be will depend on various properties that S has and various relations that it enters into. Here are three examples:

(a) Features that S appears to have just in itself, making it beautiful and pleasant or ugly and unpleasant to the mind.

(b) The amount of pleasure or displeasure that appears to come with S or to result from it. Such accompaniments and consequences are viewed as relational properties [Edwards calls them 'circumstances'] of the object, and should therefore count as belonging to it—as it were *parts* of it.

(c) How far off in time the pleasure or displeasure appears to be. The mind finds the temporal nearness of a pleasure to be agreeable, and finds a pleasure's temporal remoteness to be disagreeable; so that if upshots S and S^* appear to the mind to be exactly alike in how much pleasure they involve, and alike in every other respect except that S is temporally closer than S^* , the mind will find S to be the more agreeable of the two, and so will choose it. The two upshots are equally agreeable considered in themselves, but not with their relational properties taken into account, because S has the additional agreeableness of the relational property of being temporally nearer.

(2) Another thing that helps to make it the case that *upshot S , as viewed by a particular mind, is agreeable* is *how* that mind views S . If S appears to be connected with future pleasure, its agreeableness will be affected not only by the amount of pleasure and the apparent temporal nearness of that pleasure, but also facts about *how* that future pleasure is registered in the mind in question—especially by the following two.

(a) As well as the question of how far in the future the mind thinks the pleasure is, there is the question of how sure it is that there will be such pleasure. It is more agreeable to have a certain happiness than an uncertain one; and a

pleasure viewed as more probable is, other things being equal, more agreeable than one viewed as less probable.

(b) Agreeableness is also affected by the liveliness or the strength of the present idea or thought [Edwards writes 'idea or apprehension'] of the future pleasure. When we are thinking about things past, present or future, our ideas of them vary greatly in their clarity, liveliness and strength. The ideas of sense-perceptible things that we get from immediate sensation are usually much livelier than the ones we have in mere imagination or in thinking about them in their absence. My idea of the sun when I •look at it is more vivid than when I only •think of it. Our idea of an apple's taste is usually stronger when we •eat it than when we only •imagine it. And if we think about something at several different times, the ideas we have at those times may differ in strength and clarity. . . . Well, the *strength* of the idea or the sense that men have of future good or evil has a great influence on what volitions they perform. Suppose someone has to choose between two kinds of •possible• future pleasure S and S* which he regards as equally pleasurable and equally probable; if he has a livelier present *sense* of S he is much more likely to pursue it than to pursue S*. Going after •the pleasure of which he has a strong and lively sense is more agreeable to his mind *now* than going after •the pleasure of which he has only a faint idea. His view of S is accompanied by the stronger appetite, the •thought of• not having S is accompanied by the stronger uneasiness; and it is agreeable to his mind to have its appetite gratified and its uneasiness removed. Suppose now that someone has to choose from among several •possible• future pleasures, which differ among themselves in respect of

- how great he thinks each pleasure will be,
- how lively his idea is of each pleasure, and
- how probable he thinks each pleasure is;

with none of the candidates being at the top in each respect. In such a case, the over-all agreeableness that determines his volition will be in some way compounded out of the above three factors, because all three jointly settle how agreeable a given objective is *now*, and that is how volition will be determined.

How agreeable or disagreeable a possible object of choice is to someone's mind depends in part on the person's over-all state of mind. This includes

- very durable• features that are part of his basic nature,
- fairly durable• features caused in him by education, example, custom, etc., and
- temporary features that constitute his mood at this moment.

•Because of the third of these•, one object may differ in how agreeable a given person finds it at different times. •And then there are inter-personal differences•. Some men find it most agreeable to follow their reason; others to follow their appetites. To some men it is more agreeable to •deny a vicious inclination than to •gratify it; for others it's the other way around. People differ in how disagreeable they find it to oppose something that they used to support. In these and many other respects, different things will be most agreeable to different people, and even to one person at different times.

[In the next paragraph Edwards says that perhaps those frame-of-mind features affect volition only *through* affecting how •the person's mind views the nature and relational properties of S, and/or •how lively the person's idea of S is; and if that is so, it is needless and even wrong to mention 'frame of mind' as something additional to the preceding two. Then:] Anyway, this much is certain: volition *always* pursues the greatest apparent good, in the way I have explained. The mind's choice *always* picks on the one of

the available options that appears to be over-all the most agreeable and pleasing. I am saying this about the *direct and immediate* objects of the will, not the remote or indirect ones. If the immediate objects of the will are a man's own actions, then he wills the actions that appear most agreeable to him. If right now what is most agreeable to him, all things considered, is to walk, then he now wills to walk. [Other examples are given. Then:]

When men act voluntarily, doing what they please, then they do what suits them best or what is most agreeable to them.

There is scarcely a plainer and more universal dictate of the sense and experience of mankind than *that*. To say that someone

- does what he pleases, i.e. does what pleases him, and yet
- does not do what is agreeable to him amounts to saying that he
- does what he pleases but does not act his pleasure [Edwards's exact phrase], and that amounts to saying that
- he does what he pleases and yet doesn't do what he pleases.

The upshot of all this is that in some sense the will always follows the last dictate of the understanding. In what sense? Well, the 'understanding' must be taken in a broad sense as including the whole faculty of •perception or •thought, not merely the part of it that is called •reason or •judgment. Suppose we take 'the dictate of the understanding' to mean 'whatever *reason* declares to be best, or most conducive to the person's happiness, over the long haul', it's **not true** that the will always follows the last dictate of the understanding. [Edwards goes on to say that when we are considering how to act, the dictates of reason will be *one ingredient* in the mix

of relevant considerations; but it doesn't always outweigh all the others.]

I hope that what I have said in this section somewhat illustrates and confirms •the thesis that I advanced near the start of the section, namely that the will is always determined by *the strongest motive* or by *the mental view that has the greatest tendency to arouse volition*. Even if I haven't had the good fortune to explain what the strength of motives consists in, that won't overthrow •the thesis itself, which is fairly evident just on the face of it. It will be centrally important in the rest of this book; and I hope that its truth will show up very clearly by the time I have finished what I have to say on the subject of human liberty.

Section 3: The meanings of 'necessary', 'impossible', 'unable' etc., and of 'contingent'

The words 'necessary', 'impossible' etc. are abundantly used in controversies about free will and moral agency. So the sense in which they are used should be clearly understood. One might say that

- It is necessary that P when it *must* be the case that P and *can't* not be the case that P,

but this wouldn't properly define 'necessary', any more than the reverse.

- It must be the case that P when it's *necessary* that P is a proper definition of 'must'. The words 'must', 'can' and 'cannot' need to be explained as much as 'necessary' and 'impossible' do, the only difference being that 'must' etc. are words that we use more as children than 'necessary' and 'impossible'.

•'NECESSARY' AS USED IN ORDINARY LANGUAGE•

'Necessary' as used in common speech is a relative term. [The rest of this paragraph expands what Edwards wrote, in ways that

·small dots· can't easily convey.] (a) We say 'It is necessary for him to abandon ship' (or more colloquially 'He'll have to abandon ship') meaning that his abandoning ship can't be prevented by anything *he* can do. (b) In the basic and proper sense of 'necessary', something is called 'necessary' meaning that it couldn't be prevented by anything at all—anything we can conceive of happening. **The word is relative in each usage:** in (a) it is relative to some specified kind of opposition; in (b) it is relative to every conceivable kind of opposition.

·As well as being a relative term, 'necessary' belongs to a tightly inter-connected cluster of terms that are *all* relative. [Edwards doesn't use the word 'cluster', but it's a convenient label for a concept that is hard at work in this section.] 'Necessary' is tightly tied to 'impossible'—to say that S is necessary is to say that it's impossible that S should not happen; and 'impossible' is clearly a relative term—to say that S is 'impossible' is to say that some supposed power exerted to make S happen is not sufficient to do this; ·as when we say 'It's impossible for him to swim to shore', meaning that no efforts that *he* can exert will suffice to let him swim to shore·. 'Unable' is also relative; it relates to some ability or effort that isn't sufficient. And 'irresistible' is relative; it always has reference to resistance that •may be made to some force or power tending to an effect and •is insufficient to withstand the power or hinder the effect. The common notion of necessity and impossibility—the thread that holds the cluster together—implies something that frustrates effort or desire. Here several things are to be noted.

(1) Things are said to be (a) necessary in general which do or will exist or happen, despite any supposable opposition from whatever quarter. But things are said to be (b) necessary *to us* which do or will exist or happen, despite all opposition supposable in the case *from us*. The same holds also for 'impossible' and other such like terms. ·Roughly and

idiomatically, (a) goes with

•S can't be stopped',

while (b) goes with

•You can't stop S'.

Each of these is relative, because each involves some thought of possible, conceivable, supposable opposition to S's coming about·.

(2) In controversies about liberty and moral agency, the terms in the 'necessary'-cluster are mostly used in sense (b), i.e. in the sense of 'necessary (or impossible) *to us*, this being relative to any supposable opposition or effort that *we* might make.

(3) When we say that S is necessary *to us*, the 'supposable opposition' we are thinking of is an opposition of our *wills*—some *voluntary* exertion or effort of ours to prevent S from happening. ·This isn't a limited special case of opposition-by-us·; our *only* way of opposing S (with 'oppose' taken strictly) is by voluntarily opposing it. So any statement of the form

•S must be, *as to us*, or

•S is necessary, *as to us*,

means that S will come about even if we want it not to and try to stop it from happening, which always either consists in or implies opposition of our *wills*.

It's obvious that all the words in this cluster are, in their ordinary use, understood in this manner. Thus:

•S is necessary—We can't stop S from happening, try as we may.

•S is impossible to us—S won't happen however hard we try to stop it.

•S is irresistible—S overcomes all our resistance to it, all our attempts to block it.

•We are unable to make S happen— Our supposable desires and attempts are insufficient to make it hap-

pen.

The common use of ordinary language habituates us to using and understanding these expressions in the way I have described; through daily use of them from our childhood onwards, these meanings become fixed and settled in our minds. . . . We may decide to use words in the ‘necessity’ cluster in a different sense, treating them as technical terms; but if we aren’t *very* careful we’ll slide back to their ordinary meanings. Then we’ll be using these supposed technical terms in an inconsistent manner that will deceive and confuse us in our reasonings and in expounding our results.

(4) [Edwards’s next point will be expressed as one about ‘necessary’, and then re-applied to the other members of the ‘necessity’ cluster. His own formulation applies the point to the whole cluster from outset—but it is hard to follow in that form.] Let S be some state of affairs, some possible outcome, such that

•there isn’t and can’t be any coherent thought of S’s being opposed in any way, i.e. such that the very nature of S rules out any possibility of its being opposed, any possibility of a will or effort being exerted to prevent S from being the case.

If for an S of that sort someone says ‘S is necessary’, he is not using ‘necessary’ with its proper meaning; he is either uttering nonsense or using ‘necessary’ in some new sense different from its basic and proper meaning. . . . Here are two examples, the second of which brings in another member of the ‘necessity’ cluster:

- ‘At a time when a man prefers virtue to vice, it is **necessary** for him to choose virtue rather than vice.’
- ‘At a time when a man prefers virtue to vice, it **must be** that he chooses virtue rather than vice.’

And two more, bringing in two more members of the cluster::

- ‘As long as a man has a certain choice, it is **impossible** that he should not have that choice.’
- ‘As long as a man has a certain choice, his having it is **irresistible**.’

Each of these four is either nonsense or a non-standard use of a member of the ‘necessary’ cluster, using it in a sense different from its ordinary one. You can see why. The ordinary senses of the words in the ‘necessary’ cluster involves a reference to supposable opposition, unwillingness and resistance to S’s becoming the case; and in these four examples S itself is willing and choosing—you don’t choose or decide or will to prefer virtue to vice, or choose or decide or will to have a certain choice.

(5) These remarks imply that words in the ‘necessity’ cluster are often used by scientists and philosophers in a sense quite different from their common and basic meaning; for they apply them to many cases where no opposition is supposable. For example, they use them with respect to •God’s existence before the creation of the world, when there was no other being; with regard to •many of God’s dispositions and acts, such as his loving himself, loving righteousness, hating sin, and so on; and with regard to •many cases—like my recent quartet of examples—where some member of the cluster is applied to the inclinations and actions of created intelligent beings, so that there can’t be any question of there being an opposition of the will because the item in question is defined in terms of the will.

•‘NECESSARY’ AS USED BY PHILOSOPHERS•

Metaphysical or *philosophical* necessity is just a thing’s certainty. I’m talking not about something’s being •known for certain, but about its being •in itself certain. This •inherent-certainty is the *basis* for the certainty of the knowledge, the *basis* for the infallibility of the proposition that affirms it.

Philosophical necessity has sometimes been defined as ‘That by which a thing cannot *not* be’ or ‘That whereby a thing cannot be otherwise’. But neither of these is a proper definition, for two reasons. (a) Neither definition could be **helpful**, even if it were correct, because the words ‘can’ and ‘cannot’ need explanation as much as does the word ‘necessity’; so that explaining ‘necessary’ through ‘can’ is no better than explaining ‘can’ through ‘necessary’... (b) Anyway, neither definition is **correct**, because ‘can’ etc. belong to the ordinary-language ‘necessity’ cluster, and are thus relative terms, whose meaning involves the thought of some power that is or might be exerted. . . etc., whereas the word ‘necessity’ as used by philosophers is, as I have pointed out, not relative in this way.

[Edwards is going to speak repeatedly of the ‘subject’ and the ‘predicate’ of a proposition; but the propositions he is talking about include many that aren’t obviously of the subject-predicate form. This may not be much of a hindrance to following his thought. It soon becomes clear that he counts ‘existent’ as a predicate, so that for him ‘God exists’ is a subject-predicate proposition, as is ‘There are tigers’ because it is equivalent to ‘Tigers exist’.] For a proposition to be necessary in the philosophical sense of ‘necessary’ is for there to be a full and fixed connection between •whatever its subject signifies and •whatever its predicate signifies. Philosophical necessity is just this full and fixed connection.

what Edwards wrote next: When the subject and predicate of the proposition, which affirms the existence of anything—either •substance, •quality, •act, or •circumstance—have a full and certain connection, then the existence or being of that thing is said to be ‘necessary’ in a metaphysical sense.

what he meant: When there is that kind of connection between the subject and the predicate of a proposition which asserts that a •substance exists, that something has a certain •quality, that an •event occurs, or that •a state of affairs

obtains or is the case, then it is said to be *necessary*, in the metaphysical or philosophical sense, that the •substance exists, that the thing has the •quality, that the •event occurs, or that the •state of affairs obtains.

It is in *that* sense of ‘necessity’ that I shall be arguing in this book that necessity is not inconsistent with liberty.

There are three ways in which the subject and predicate of a proposition that asserts existence of something x can have a full, fixed, and certain connection.

(a) They may have a full and perfect connection **•in and of themselves**, because the supposition that they are not connected implies a contradiction or gross absurdity. There are many cases of this—many things that are necessary •in their own nature. An example is the eternal existence of *being*—not this or that individual being, or this or that kind of being, but just being in general; this is necessary in itself, meaning that it is philosophically necessary that at every time *there is something*, i.e. *something exists*. Why? Because denying the existence of being in general, i.e. saying that *there is absolutely nothing*, would be **in itself** the greatest absurdity, as it were the sum of all contradictions [Edwards’s exact phrase]. (I could prove that, but this isn’t the right place to do so.) Other examples: It is philosophically necessary that

- God is infinite, omniscient, just, etc.,
- two and two make four,
- all straight lines from a circle’s centre to its circumference are equal,
- men should treat others as they would like to be treated [Edwards calls this not only ‘necessary’ but also ‘fit and suitable’].

There are countless other examples of metaphysical and mathematical truths that are necessary **in themselves**; in each case, the subject and predicate of the proposition that

asserts them are perfectly connected **of themselves**.

(b) They may have a full and perfect connection because the proposition of which they are the subject and predicate asserts the **past or present** existence of *x*. Because *x* *did* or *does now* exist, it has (as it were) made sure of its existence; and the proposition asserting that *x* does or did exist is made certain and necessarily and unalterably true. The past event has fixed and decided the matter. . . . Thus, if *x* has already come into existence, is it now necessary; it has become impossible for it to be false that *x* has existed. [Bear in mind that although *x* may be a genuine thing = substance, it may instead be a quality or event or state affairs.]

(c) They may have a real and certain connection **con-sequentially**, so that the existence of *x* is consequentially necessary—meaning that it is surely and firmly connected with something else that is necessary in the manner of either (a) or (b)—that is, something else that either (a) is absolutely necessary in its own nature or with something that (b) has already come into existence and thus made sure of existence. This necessity consists in—or can be explained through—the connection of two or more propositions one with another. Things that are perfectly connected with other things that are necessary are themselves necessary by a necessity of **consequence**.

If *x* lies only in the future, it can't be necessary *now* in any way except (c) consequentially. It can't be necessary (a) in itself, because anything that is necessary in itself has always existed. And for obvious reasons, a purely future *x* can't be (b) necessary through being securely lodged in the past or present. And the scope of consequent necessity extends much more widely still: if *x* is (b) necessary because lodged in the past, then *x* at some time *began* to exist; and before that time the only necessity it could have was (c) the consequential sort. To say it again in slightly different

words: Let *x* be an effect or outcome or anything else that did or will have a beginning: then the only way it can be true that *x* *necessarily* did or *necessarily* will come into existence is by the coming-into-existence of *x* being necessitated by something that existed already. So *this* is the necessity that is especially involved in controversies about the acts of the will.

As we get into those controversies it may be useful to bear this in mind: when a thing exists with metaphysical necessity, that necessity may be either (i) general or (ii) particular. (This runs parallel to the general/particular line that I drew through ordinary-language 'necessity'. The existence of a thing *x* is necessary with (i) a **general** necessity if

all things considered, there is a foundation for the certainty of *x*'s existence, i.e. the most general and universal view of things shows an infallible connection between the subject and the predicate of the proposition asserting *x*'s existence.

The occurrence of an event x_e or the existence of a thing x_t can be said to be necessary with (ii) a **particular** necessity relative to some person or thing or time: if

no facts concerning that person or thing or time •have any bearing on the certainty of the occurrence of x_e or the existence of x_t , i.e. no such facts •can play any part in determining the infallibility of the connection of the subject and predicate of the relevant proposition.

When that is the case, the situation is the same—at least as regards that person or thing, at least at that time—as if the existence were necessary with a necessity that is entirely universal and absolute. Examples of this include the many cases where something happens to an individual person without his will's being in any way involved in the occurrence. Whether or not the happening is necessary with regard to

things in general, it is necessary to that person and happens to him whatever his will may be doing. . . . In this book I shall have occasion to use the notion of particular necessity as it applies to particular cases. Is everything that is •necessary with a particular necessity also •necessary with a general necessity? That may be something we'll have to consider; but we can leave it aside now, because either way we can use the distinction between the two kinds of philosophical necessity.

What I have said may sufficiently explain the terms 'necessary' and 'necessity' as technical terms that are often used by metaphysicians and controversial writers on theology—with a sense that is broader than their basic ordinary-language meaning that I explained in section 3.

And it may also sufficiently explain the opposite terms 'impossible' and 'impossibility', for these differ from the others only as negative differs from positive. Impossibility is just negative necessity: a thing's existence is impossible just in case its not existing is necessary. And the negative terms have a technical sense which differs from the ordinary-language one in a manner exactly parallel to how the ordinary-language sense of 'necessary' differs from its technical philosophical sense.

The words 'unable' and 'inability' also have technical senses differing from their ordinary ones in the same way. That's because philosophers and theologians—especially in controversies about free will—often apply these words to cases where the ordinary-language senses can't get a grip because there is no thought of anything's being brought about through an exercise of the will, i.e. through *trying*.

The analogous thing has also happened to the term 'contingent' and its relatives. In the basic ordinary-language senses of the words, a thing is said to be 'contingent', or to happen 'by chance' or 'by accident', if its connection with

its causes (i.e. its antecedents according to the established course of things) is not detected, so that we couldn't have foreseen it. And an event is said to be contingent or accidental *relative to us* if it happens without our foreknowledge and without our having planned or envisaged it.

But 'contingent' is lavishly used in a very different sense, with 'x is contingent' being used to mean *not*

we couldn't detect the prior events connected with x,
so we couldn't have foreseen x,

but rather

x occurred without being grounded in or caused by
any prior events with which its existence had a fixed
and certain connection.

Section 4: The division of necessity and inability into natural and moral

The philosophical necessity that I have explained divides into •moral necessity and •natural necessity. You'll recall that this kind of necessity involves an infallible connection between the thing signified by the subject and the thing signified by the predicate of the relevant proposition; well, such a case of necessity is classified as *moral* if the subject of the proposition is a thinking being; otherwise not.

I shan't stop to inquire into how sharp and deep this distinction is; I shall merely explain how these two sorts of necessity are understood as they are used in various places, including this book.

The phrase 'moral necessity' has various uses; I shall pick out three of them, two because they are pretty common, and the third because it is the use I shall adhere to in this book. (i) There is the necessity of moral obligation: we say that a man is under moral necessity when he is subject to bonds of duty and conscience from which he can't be let

off ('He *had* to do it; he had solemnly promised to·'). An analogous *non*-moral notion of necessity kicks in when we say that someone is bound by his own interests ('He *had* to do it; otherwise he'd have been ruined·'). **(ii)** Sometimes the language of moral necessity is tied to the notion of moral evidentness: it can be morally evident that P if the evidence for P is strong enough to be relied on in moral reasoning. [In the present day, people sometimes say things of the form 'It's a moral certainty that P' meaning that P's truth is certain enough for practical purposes. That's the notion that Edwards is talking about here.] In this usage, to say that something is •'morally necessary' is to say that it's morally evident that the relevant items are connected in the relevant way. This is different from its being •absolutely necessary, which involves the sure connection of things that is a basis for infallible certainty. •Moral necessity—understood in this way—is about the same as •the high degree of probability that is usually sufficient to satisfy mankind when they are considering how to conduct themselves in matters involving their own safety and interests and the proper treatment of others. **(iii)** And sometimes 'moral necessity' is used to mean the necessity of connection and consequence that arises from such moral causes as the strength of inclinations or motives, and the connection that these often have with volitions and actions. That's the sense in which I use the phrase 'moral necessity' in this book. [In the phrase 'moral causes' Edwards uses 'moral' in an old meaning = 'having to do with the aspects of the human condition that do or can involve thought'—a usage in which psychology, for example, counted as one of the 'moral sciences'. That covers acknowledged motives and reasons, and also *habits* and their like. One might thoughtlessly act from a habit, but even there one *could* thoughtfully consider whether to resist the habit.—We can't replace 'moral cause' by 'human cause'; Edwards is about the explain why.]

By 'natural necessity' as applied to men I mean any

necessity that a man is subject to through the force of •natural causes, as distinct from so-called •moral causes such as habits, dispositions of the heart, moral motives, and inducements. Three examples of natural necessity as applied to humans: **(i)** When men are placed in certain circumstances, they necessarily have certain sensations—pains when their bodies are wounded, visual sensations when objects are presented to them in clear light and their eyes are open. **(ii)** When men understand the terms used in certain propositions, they ·necessarily· assent to the propositions' truth—e.g. that two and two make four, that black is not white, and that two parallel lines can never cross one another. **(iii)** When there is nothing to support a man's body, it ·necessarily· moves downwards.

Here are three points of some importance concerning these two kinds of necessity, moral and natural. ·Remember that the moral necessity I'll be talking about is always the kind **(ii)** that involves psychological causation, not the kind **(i)** that involves moral obligation, duty, and so on·.

(1) Moral necessity can be as absolute as natural necessity. That is, the effect may be as perfectly connected with its moral cause as a naturally necessary effect is connected with its natural cause. You may not ·yet· agree that the will is *always* ·absolutely· necessarily determined by the strongest motive, and can't *ever* resist such a motive or oppose the strongest present inclination. But I don't think anyone will deny that in *some* cases a previous bias and inclination, or the motive that is presented, is so powerful that the act of the will is certainly and unbreakably connected with it. ·If you have doubts about that, then consider·: Everyone agrees that when a motive or previous bias is very strong, there is some difficulty in going against it, and that if it were even stronger the difficulty would be greater. Therefore, if the motive were further strengthened to a certain degree, the difficulty of

resisting it would rise to the level of complete impossibility. Why? Simply because whatever power men may have to surmount difficulties their power is not *infinite*; it thus has limits, beyond which the man has no power. . . . So it must be conceded that there can be a sure and perfect connection between moral causes and their effects; and *this*—and only this—is what I call ‘moral necessity’.

(2) When I draw a line between ‘moral’ and ‘natural’ necessity, I’m not implying that *the nature of things* is involved only in the latter and not in the former. When a moral habit or motive is so strong that the act of the will infallibly follows, this is because of the nature of things—I’m not denying that! But ‘natural’ and ‘moral’ are the labels usually given to these two kinds of necessity, and we need *some* labels for them, because the difference between them has very important consequences. It isn’t a difference between two kinds of connection, however, but rather between the things that are connected. What marks off moral necessity is that •the cause is of a moral nature (either some previous habitual disposition or some motive presented to the understanding), and •the effect is likewise of a moral nature, consisting in some inclination or volition of the soul or some voluntary action.

[Edwards now devotes a page to a suggested explanation for how ‘natural necessity’ and kindred expressions are used. It boils down to this: We get our first notion of *nature* from the orderliness we observe in the perceptible material world; so we prefer to use some word other than ‘nature’ for events that don’t obviously fit into *those* patterns of order. Where we can’t see how an event fits in with the general order, we bring in such terms as ‘accident’, ‘chance’, etc. In the special case where something comes about partly through a choice that some person has made, we bring in the term ‘choice’, and think of this as distinct from nature—as though •material

causes operating through the laws of motion were *one* source of observable events, and •choice were *another*. Clearly Edwards thinks that neither nature/chance nor nature/choice is a clean and deep distinction. But we talk in these ways, he concludes, because] things are usually labelled according to what is most obvious, what is suggested by what appears to the senses without reflection and research.

(3) In explaining ‘moral necessity’, I have *not* been using ‘necessity’ in its basic ordinary-language meaning. As I showed in Section 3, the basic ordinary-language senses of the words in the ‘necessity’ cluster are •relative: they speak of how the item to which the word is being applied •relates to some supposable voluntary opposition or effort. And no such opposition or contrary will and effort is supposable in the case of moral necessity, because that moral necessity is a certainty of the inclination and will itself, leaving no room for the supposition of an opposing will. To suppose that •one individual will opposes itself in its present act, or that •a present choice is opposite to—and sets up resistance to—a present choice, is as absurd as it is to talk of a single body moving in two opposite directions at the same time. . . .

What I have said about natural and moral •necessity can be re-applied to natural and moral •inability. We are said to be ‘**naturally unable**’ to do x if

•Even• if we will to do x, we *can’t* do it because it is ruled out by what is most commonly called ‘nature’, i.e. because of some obstacle that lies outside the will.

The obstacle to a man’s reaching the summit of a mountain (•to take a single example•) may lie

- in his faculty of understanding—•he hasn’t learned how to ‘read’ the weather•,
- the constitution of his body—•he hasn’t enough muscular strength•, or
- external objects—•he would freeze to death on the

way.

Moral inability doesn't consist in any of these things but rather in the lack of inclination or the strength of a contrary inclination—i.e. the person's not being aware of sufficient motives to induce and arouse the act of the will, or the strength of apparent motives to the contrary. [Edwards first states these—the 'inclination' story and the 'motive' story—as though they were different, and then goes on to say that they amount to the same thing.]

Here are some instances of moral inability. •A chaste and honourable woman may be morally unable to prostitute herself to her slave. •A dutiful and loving child may be morally unable to kill his father. •A very lascivious man may in some circumstances, where there are great temptations and no external restraints, be unable to refrain from gratifying his lust. •A drunkard may in certain circumstances be unable to refrain from drinking liquor. •A very malicious man may be unable to bring benefits to an enemy, or to want the enemy to prosper. •Someone with a very vile character may be unable to love those who are most worthy of his esteem and affection. •Someone with a very holy disposition and a strong habit of virtue may be morally unable to love wickedness in general, to get pleasure from wicked persons or things, or to choose a wicked life in preference to a virtuous one. And, on the other hand, •someone who has a great degree of habitual wickedness may be morally unable to love and choose holiness, and utterly •morally• unable to love an infinitely holy Being, •namely God•, or to choose and cling to him as his chief good.

Cases of moral inability can be classified into two kinds—**(a)** general and habitual, and **(b)** particular and occasional. By **(a)** 'general and habitual moral inability' I mean an inability in the heart to perform any acts of will of the kind in question, because of (i) a fixed and habitual inclination •going

the other way• or (ii) an habitual and stated defect in (or lack of) a certain kind of inclination. For example, (i) a very ill-natured man may be unable to perform acts of kindness of the sort a good-natured man often performs; and (ii) a man whose heart is habitually devoid of gratitude may be unable to perform acts of gratitude because of that stated defect of a grateful inclination. By **(b)** 'particular and occasional moral inability' I mean an inability of the will or heart to perform some particular act because of the strength or defect of *present* motives or because of inducements presented to the view of the understanding *on this occasion*. [Regarding 'strength or defect': Edwards presumably means the strength of motives *not* to perform x or the lack of strong motives *to* perform x.] If I am right that the will is always determined by the strongest motive [see page 3], then it must always have a particular and occasional inability to act otherwise than it does; because it isn't possible, *ever*, that the will should *now* go against the motive that *now* has, all things considered, the greatest advantage to induce the action in question. When people speak of 'inability' in ordinary informal contexts, they are usually talking about general and habitual moral ability. . . . The main reason for this is as follows. The word 'inability' in its basic ordinary-language use is a relative term: when someone is said to be 'unable' to do x, the thought is that he wants to do x but no will or effort that he can be supposed to exert would be sufficient to bring about x. Now, this thought is never appropriate when x = *doing something other than what he is actually doing*. Whether the man's present action is occasional or habitual, there is no way to suppose him to exert will and effort against, or different from, what he is doing; because that would involve supposing his will to be *now* different from what it is *now*. However, even when x = *doing something other than what he is actually doing*, there can be—though not a *real* ordinary-language

‘inability’—the appearance and shadow [Edwards’s phrase] of such an inability. Here is what makes it possible:

When someone is voluntarily doing *x*, there is no room for any thought about how he would be acting now if he wanted and tried not to do *x*; but there *is* room for a thought about how he would act on a *later* occasion if he *now* wanted and tried to prevent himself from doing *x* on that later occasion. There is no contradiction in supposing that the acts of the will at •one time go against the acts of the same will at •another time; someone may want to, and try to, prevent or arouse certain future acts of his will; and it can happen that in a given case his desire and attempt is not enough to prevent the future act.

•And so we get the ‘appearance and shadow’ of ordinary-language ‘inability’ to act other than how one does act. When someone is doing *x* voluntarily, the question ‘Would he be doing *x* now if he didn’t want to or tried not to?’ is always Yes, just because his action is voluntary; so the notion of inability-to-do-otherwise gets no grip. But questions of the form ‘Will he do *x* on such-and-such a future occasion if he *now* wants and tries not to do so?’ will sometimes have the answer Yes and sometimes No; and when the answer is No, we have the ‘appearance and shadow’ of ordinary-language inability, to which I referred above. When the action in question is a strongly habitual one, the answer is likely to be No. In those cases, desires and attempts to act differently in future are defeated by the strength of a fixed habit, which overcomes and baffles all opposition; in this respect a man may be in miserable slavery and bondage to a strong habit. In contrast with this, it can be comparatively easy to make an alteration with respect to merely occasional and transient future acts, because the transient cause of such an act, if it is foreseen, can often easily be prevented or avoided. That

completes my explanation of why it is that the moral inability that accompanies fixed habits is especially likely to be called ‘inability’ •by people who are speaking informally and not meaning to use technical terms•.

But bear in mind that in the phrase ‘moral inability’, when it is properly used, the word ‘inability’ is used in a sense very different from its basic meaning. In the latter meaning, a person is said to be ‘unable’ to do *x* only if he wouldn’t be doing *x* even if he wanted or were inclined to do *x*. Take the case of a nasty man, and let him be as malicious as you like: it won’t be true (in the ordinary basic sense of the term) that he is ‘unable’ to refrain from punching someone, or that he ‘cannot’ exhibit kindness towards someone else. It won’t be true that a drunkard—however strongly addicted to alcohol he may be—‘cannot’ keep the cup from his mouth. In strictly correct speech, a man has a thing ‘in his power’ if it is *up to him* whether it occurs or not: a man can’t be truly said to be unable to do *x* when he can do it if he wills to do it. It is •wrong to say that a person can’t perform external actions that depend on acts of the will and that would be easily performed if the act of the will occurred. And it is in a way even •more wrong to say that he can’t perform the act of the will itself; because it is more obviously false to say ‘He can’t do *x*, even if he wills to’ where *x* is itself an act of the will, for that amounts to saying that he can’t will •to do *y*• even if he does will •to do *y*•. This is a kind of case where not only is it easy for the man to do the thing if he wills to do it, but the willing is itself the doing—once he has willed to do *y*, the thing *x* is performed. In these cases, therefore, it is simply wrong to explain someone’s not doing *x* to his lacking the power or ability to do it—wrong because what he lacks is not *being able* but *being willing*. He has the required faculties of mind and natural capacities and everything else except a disposition: the only thing lacking is a will.

Section 5: The notions of liberty and moral agency

·LIBERTY·

The plain and obvious meaning of the words ‘freedom’ and ‘liberty’ in common speech is *the power, opportunity, or advantage that anyone has to do as he pleases*. Or, in other words, the person’s being free from blockage or obstacle in the way of doing, or in any way conducting himself, as he wills.¹

And the opposite of liberty—whatever name we give it—is a person’s being hindered or unable to do such-and-such as he wills, i.e. his being necessitated to act otherwise.

I don’t think any fair-minded and competent speaker of English will deny that what I have just offered is indeed the meaning of ‘liberty’ in the ordinary speech. If it is, then liberty and its opposite can’t properly be ascribed to any being that doesn’t have a faculty—power—property—of the sort that is called ‘will’. A thing can’t have a power or opportunity to act according to its will, and can’t be necessitated to act contrary to its will, if it doesn’t *have* a will! To talk as though the will itself has liberty or its opposite is, therefore, *nonsense*—if we identify sense and nonsense in terms of the basic and proper meanings of words. The will is not an agent that *has* a will; the power of choosing doesn’t *have* a power of choosing. [In this context, an ‘agent’ is simply something that *acts*. These days an ‘agent’ is usually someone who acts *on behalf of* someone else, but that wasn’t part of the word’s meaning in Edwards’s time.] What has the power of volition—the power of choosing, the faculty of will—is the •man or the •soul and not the •power of volition itself. And someone who has the liberty to do what he wills to do is the agent—the doer—who *has* the will, not the will that he has. . . . Freedom is the property of an agent who has

powers and faculties such as being cunning, brave, generous, or zealous. But these qualities are properties of persons, not properties of properties.

[Edwards repeats this point as applied to the opposite of liberty; and remarks that it is presented ‘with great clearness’ in Locke’s *Essay*.]

One more point about what is called ‘liberty’ in common speech: *all* it refers to is the person’s power and opportunity to act •as he will or •according to his choice; the meaning of the word doesn’t bring in anything about the cause of •that choice or about how the person came to have •such a volition. Was his choice or volition caused by some external motive or internal habitual bias? determined by some internal antecedent volition or happened without a cause? necessarily connected with some previous state or event or not so connected? The answers to questions like these have no bearing on whether the person was free according to the basic and common notion of freedom.

What I have said may be sufficient to show what ‘liberty’ means according to the common notions of mankind, and in the usual and basic meaning of the word: but when the word ‘liberty’ is used by Arminians, Pelagians and others who oppose the Calvinists, it means something entirely different. [Arminians were followers of Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609). Some of his complex disagreements with Calvinism (of which Edwards was a proponent) will come up in the Conclusion of this book; but all that matters just now is that Arminians differed from Calvinists about the workings of the human will, and the content of *that* disagreement will appear clearly enough from Edwards’s text. Pelagians can for present purposes be equated with Arminians, who are mentioned about 150 times in this book.] Here are three things that Arminians believe about liberty. **(a)** It consists in a *self-determining* power in

¹ I say not only ‘doing’ but also ‘conducting himself’, because voluntarily refraining from doing—e.g. sitting still, keeping quiet, and so on—are instances of a person’s *conduct*, in which he can be at liberty; but they aren’t properly called *doing*.

the will, i.e. a certain sovereignty that the will has over itself and its own acts, whereby it determines its own volitions to the exclusion of any prior cause lying outside the will. **(b)** Liberty involves indifference, i.e. it requires that until the act of volition occurs the mind is evenly balanced between the alternatives. **(c)** Something else that is essential to liberty is contingency—not in the ordinary meaning of ‘contingency’ that I have explained [page 12] but as opposed to all necessity, i.e. to or any fixed and certain connection between the contingent item and some previous reason for its existence or occurrence. According to the Arminians, a man has no real freedom, however much he is at liberty to act according to his will, unless his will is ‘free’ in the sense given in this paragraph.

•MORAL AGENCY•

A moral agent is a being who is capable of actions that have a moral quality and can properly be called ‘good’ or ‘evil’ in a moral sense—‘virtuous’ or ‘vicious’, ‘commendable’ or ‘faulty’. To be a moral agent one has to have

- a moral faculty—a *sense* of moral good and evil, or of something’s deserving praise or blame, reward or punishment; and one must also have
- the ability to be led by moral inducements—motives presented to one’s understanding and reason—to act in ways that are agreeable to one’s moral sense.

[Edwards lists some things that can do good (the sun) or harm (house-fires) or both (‘the brute creatures’), but are not moral agents. Then:] The moral agency of a ruler differs from that of a subject in a circumstantial way—by which I mean this: the ruler and the subject are in different circumstances, so the moral inducements by which they can be influenced are different. A ruler acting purely as a ruler can’t be influenced by a moral law and its sanctions of threats and promises, rewards and punishments, as the

subject is; though both ruler and subject may be influenced by a knowledge of moral good and evil. So the moral agency of God, who acts *only* in his role as a ruler of his creatures and *never* as a subject, differs in that circumstantial way from the moral agency of created thinking beings. God’s actions, especially those he performs as a moral governor, are *morally good* in the highest degree. . . . We must think of God as influenced in the highest degree by the supreme moral inducement, namely the moral good that he sees in such and such things. Thus, he is in the strictest sense a *moral agent*—the source of all moral ability and agency, the fountain and rule of all virtue and moral good—although because of his being supreme over everything it isn’t possible for him to be influenced by law or command, promises or threats, rewards or punishments, advice or warnings. So God has the essential qualities of a moral agent in the greatest possible perfection—

- understanding, to see the difference between moral good and evil;
- a capacity to see the moral worthiness and unworthiness by which some things are praiseworthy while others deserve of blame and punishment; and also
- a capacity to choose, and to do so under the guidance of the understanding, and a power to act as he chooses or pleases, and a capacity to do the things that are in the highest sense praiseworthy.

We read in Genesis 1:27 that ‘God created man in his own likeness’, this being how he distinguished man from the beasts [= ‘the lower animals’]. What I have been discussing is God’s natural likeness, namely his capacity for moral agency. Man was initially made also in God’s spiritual likeness; that consisted in the moral excellence with which he was endowed.