

SELF-DETERMINATION

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1. For many thinkers in the seventeenth century, self-determination is the mark of free agency: a free agent is one who determines himself, and conversely. To determine oneself, in this context, is to be the cause of one's own actions, and that in two ways. A self-determiner brings it about, first, that he does something, as opposed to not acting at all. And second, he brings it about that the action he performs is of some specific kind, as opposed to being an action of some other kind.¹ Not to be self-determined, then, with respect to a particular action, is for that action to be caused (if caused at all) by something other than the agent himself. This other thing may be altogether distinct from the agent: another person or some external impersonal factor. Or it may be something that is within the agent in some way but is distinguishable from himself - that is, from his real or true self. An action whose cause is a thing or person other than the agent who performs it is said to be determined by that thing or person, and the latter is said to determine it. Correspondingly, when an agent himself is the cause of an action, he is said to determine that action, and the action is said to be determined by him. Thus the term "determine" is used in such wise that free agents can be said to determine their own actions as well as their own selves. Indeed, when an agent is said to determine himself, what is usually meant is that he determines himself to act or to act in such and such way.

2. The terms "determine" and "determination" had other uses in seventeenth-century philosophical writing. Sometimes to determine something was to decide or settle it; to ascertain or establish it; to direct or regulate it; or to fix, delimit, or define it. But the causal use that I have just characterized is the one that most pertains to the concept of self-determination and thence to that of free agency.

3. Self-determinism took several different forms in the seventeenth century. By self-determinism I mean the compound doctrine (a) that human beings are free agents - that is, that they are free with respect to at least some of their actions - and (b) that being free is equivalent to being self-determined. In this paper I shall consider three forms of this doctrine, professed respectively by Locke, Cudworth, and Hobbes's adversary John Bramhall. Hobbes himself, of course, was not a self-determinist. He held that human beings are free agents, at least in his sense of "free agent," but denied that anyone ever determines either himself or his own actions.

4. The doctrine of self-determinism was usually formulated in terms of the will. An agent who determines himself is one who determines his own will. The contrary of such an agent is one whose will is determined by something other than the agent himself - something other altogether or something other than his real or true self. Thus the verb "determine" was made to take wills as well as actions for its objects: "she or it determined her will" as well as "she or it determined her action." To determine one's will is still to determine one's actions, however, since actions are the effects - or at least the usual effects - as well as the objects of willing. To will is to will to do something, or to do this or that; but in addition, when an action is willed it (normally) follows the willing, and takes place because of it. Some writers also made wills the subjects of determination: "her will determined her action." For many of these the will is likewise an object of determination but by a different subject, namely the original agent: "she determined her will." Some even held that a self-determining agent is one whose will determines itself - determines itself, that is, to will that an action be done, which action, when it is done, is attributed to the agent. On this view, when a man freely runs, his will determines itself to will that he run, and he runs because of this willing.

5. The will played a large role in the thinking of all three of the philosophers whose views I shall be discussing. It behooves me, therefore, to give some account of it before considering the

positions of Locke, Bramhall, and Cudworth on self-determination. For this purpose it is helpful to refer to the writings of Thomas Aquinas, whose doctrines and formulations strongly influenced the moral psychology of seventeenth-century thinkers, however indirectly, and who is often more explicit about such matters than they are. I do not claim, of course, that Locke, Bramhall, and Cudworth were Thomists on the subject of human action, much less that they agreed with one another about the will: later on I shall show that they did not. But there was a common core of thought about moral agents in the seventeenth century, a set of shared conceptions and assumptions, which these three philosophers alike subscribed to; and much of this core was articulated and codified by Aquinas.

6. The will, according to Aquinas and according to these philosophers, is one of several mental faculties or powers of the human soul. Each of these faculties or powers is an ability on the part of some agent to perform actions of a certain kind. The exact identity of this agent was disputed, some making it to be the soul or the mind by itself, some the whole human being; and some, including all three of Bramhall, Locke, and Cudworth, vacillated between these two. In general, the action which having a will enables the agent to perform is that of willing or volition, but it was usual to distinguish two different forms of willing, depending on the kind of object willed. This object may be a proposition - that I be healthy - or an action - to run to the corner - or a simple thing, abstract or concrete - health or this chocolate fudge sundae, although Aquinas suggests that this variety is only apparent and that what is really willed is always an action - not the sundae but to eat or enjoy it, not health but to attain or possess it (ST IaIIae.xiii.4). In any case, the objects of willing can all be divided into ends and means, things that are willed for their own sakes and those that are willed because they conduce to something willed for its own sake, or are believed by the agent to do so. It is on the basis of this distinction that the two forms of willing are distinguished. When what is willed is an end, the action is that which Aquinas calls simple willing. When what is willed is a means to an end, the action is choice or election. In the seventeenth

century, when an author wrote about willing, what he mostly had in mind was electing or choosing: choosing to do something.

7. What is it to will and to choose? Speaking generally, Aquinas says that to will something is to desire or have an appetite for it, to “tend” or be “inclined” towards it, to favor it or be attracted to it (see, e.g., ST Iae.lxxxii.1, 2 and 5; IaIIae.vi.2 and 4; and IaIIae.viii.1 for occurrences of these various locutions). This holds whether the object is an end or a means. But in the case of choosing, where the object is a means, there is a further factor. This is that the agent wants or is inclined to do the thing in question *rather* than some alternative action which is open to him and which he takes to be a means to the same end. Choosing, as Aquinas says, includes a relation to something in preference to which the thing chosen is taken (ST Iae.lxxxiii.3; IaIIae.xiii.2). To choose, then, is not merely to favor something but to prefer it to something else: the reference to an alternative is essential.

8. Willing, and especially choosing, are not actions that occur by themselves in the soul. They happen in conjunction with actions of other faculties or powers, but especially with those of the intellect - what most English writers call the understanding. The exercises of this faculty are cognitive actions: apprehending or conceiving something, or judging or reasoning that something - some proposition, that is - is or is not the case.² These are not the only cognitive actions that human beings engage in, for sensing and imagining and remembering are also species of cognition. But the former are distinguished from the latter by being exercises of an intellectual or rational faculty, as opposed to a sensory or material one, which is to say, one involving the human body. Apprehending and judging, therefore, are aspects of human rationality; and so, because of their connection with these, are willing and choosing. Willing is rational appetite and thus stands apart from sensory desire and feeling, just as understanding is rational cognition and so is distinguished from sensory perception. Indeed Aquinas claims that no creature can have a will without having an understanding, and also conversely.³

9. How are willing and understanding connected? According to Aquinas, an act of will must be preceded by an act of understanding; in the case of choosing, the act is that of judging. A judgment or decree of the understanding, as it came to be called, has two functions, first to prompt or bring about an act of choosing in the first place, that is, to make it the case that some choosing occurs, and second to specify its object, that is, to make it the case that this action rather than some other is chosen. (This is Aquinas's distinction between the exercise and the specification of an act of willing; see ST IaIIae.x.2.) In Aquinas's view, no choice can occur unless it is caused to do so by a preceding judgment; and further, the choice must conform to the judgment in the sense that if the judgment is that *a* is better than *b*, then it is *a* and not *b* that is chosen. There was general agreement - this was not just Aquinas's view - that all the judgments, and apprehensions and reasonings too, that are effective in bringing about acts of willing concern goodness: they are judgments that something or other is good in some way. In the case of choosing, where two or more actions are involved, the requisite judgment concerns their comparative goodness.

10. Aquinas's view of the relation between choosing and judging was maintained by many of the thinkers who followed him. But already in the late thirteenth century a different view began to emerge, the work among others of Scotus and Ockham. According to this different view, an act of choosing may conform to a judgment preceding it, but it need not do so. An agent is perfectly capable of choosing to do what he himself judges to be the worst of the alternatives available to him. Furthermore, although no one denied that a choice must be preceded by some sort of intellectual activity, it being obvious that an agent must at least be aware of alternatives in order to choose between them, some did deny that the choosing had to be caused by any antecedently occurring act of judging, or even that it had to be caused by anything whatsoever. On this extreme view, it is possible for an act of choosing to occur altogether spontaneously and fortuitously.

11. Since Aquinas's view on this matter is sometimes called intellectualism, it is appropriate to call this other view voluntarism. (We also could call it indifferentism, which was Cudworth's name for it.) In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the most prominent voluntarists were the Jesuits Molina and Suarez, along with, on the Protestant side, Arminius and his followers, among them Episcopius, Limborch, and Leclerc. In Britain, Bramhall and King professed voluntarism, whereas Locke and Cudworth opposed it, although neither of the latter two was quite the intellectualist that Aquinas was.

12. Metaphysically considered, mental powers such as the will are attributes belonging to substances, namely to human beings or to their minds or souls. In addition, these substances are agents, and the actions which having such powers enables them to perform are also attributed to them. No major thinker in the seventeenth century rejected these metaphysical principles, at least openly, nor did Aquinas. But many of them, along with Aquinas, did often (in their writings) speak as if they did. For they spoke in ways that imply that the will and other such powers themselves are agents, and that the actions of willing and so forth are attributes of them and not of the minds or the men to which in metaphysical strictness they belong. It is the will, they said, that wills and the understanding that judges. These are the ways of speaking that Locke ridicules in that famous passage in the *Essay*. "We may as properly say," Locke writes, "that 'tis the singing faculty sings, and the dancing faculty dances; as that the will chuses, or that the understanding conceives" (*Essay* II.xxi.17). Similar charges were made, in similar terms, by both Hobbes and Cudworth.⁴ It is clear that all three of these philosophers took their criticisms to have substantive import. They claimed that their opponents were guilty not merely of using inaccurate or misleading language but of making a metaphysical mistake, the mistake of hypostatization; and they held that this mistaken view of the will is refuted by their criticisms.

13. But is it certain that such thinkers as Aquinas and Scotus and Bramhall and King were making those metaphysical mistakes when they spoke of the will as they did? Even Locke grants

that “when we say the will ... follows the dictates of the understanding, [such] expressions ... may be understood in a clear and distinct sense”; and that we need not be “misled ... into a confused notion of so many distinct agents in us, which ... perform several actions, as so many distinct beings” (*Essay* II.xxi.6). More recently, Alan Donagan, in an article on Aquinas’s theory of action, dismisses the “vulgar objection” that on Aquinas’s theory “human beings are resolved into a collection of faculties or powers, each of which is then treated as a quasi-agent.” The truth, Donagan claims, is that Aquinas only “speaks of what a power such as the intellect does or can do ... for convenience,” and that “such statements ... can readily, if sometimes cumbrously, be reformulated as statements ... about what human beings, as possessing that power, do or can do” (Alan Donagan, "Thomas Aquinas on Human Action," p. 654). I am inclined to agree with Donagan’s claim; and in my exposition so far I hope to have succeeded in replacing the statements that Locke and company complained of with reformulations that not only have a “clear and distinct sense,” but accurately convey the sense intended by the original authors.

14. The familiar objection, therefore, that proponents of the “faculty psychology” mistook the nature of the will, is not very serious. On the other hand, I have not yet told the whole story of the will as they conceived it. The will is indeed the power of willing, and willing is a matter of favoring or preferring an object. But it is, in addition, a “principle of action,” as Aquinas puts it, a source not only of its own “elicited” actions - willing and choosing themselves - but of actions “commanded” by it - actions such as singing and dancing of which the whole human being is the subject.⁵ Or, as Aquinas also says, the will is a “mover” (indeed a “moved mover,” since it is moved by the understanding or a judgment thereof), and what it moves are “the other powers of the soul,” including not only the understanding but the sensory and locomotive powers whose operation requires a body. The will moves these powers to exercise their own actions, judging, seeing, and walking, for example.⁶ Another thing Aquinas says is that the will “executes” its choices and “uses” these other powers to bring about the actions it commands: having chosen to

walk, it uses the locomotive power to begin and keep on walking (ST IaIIae.xvi.1 and 4). By making such statements Aquinas and company seem again to be treating the will not as a power but as an agent. This is again the metaphysical mistake of hypostatization, of making substances of entities that are really only attributes of substances. But that is not their only mistake. For by speaking of the will as “commanding” actions as well as causing them, and as “using” other powers to bring these actions about, they appear not only to hypostatize but to personify the will, an even more egregious error. Locke and Hobbes both heap special scorn upon this further usage by the faculty psychologists (LN 20; *Essay* II.xxi.17).

15. But here again, surely, it is possible to use the language of the faculty theorists without committing the metaphysical mistakes that they are charged with. We can interpret the offensive locutions as mere *façons de parler* (or, in the case of “commanding” and such, as metaphors), used for convenience (and rhetorical effect) and capable of being replaced with equivalent expressions which more accurately (and literally) convey the true nature of the matters referred to. Thus instead of saying that the will causes the intellect to judge or the locomotive power to move the legs, we can say that the human agent (or his soul) wills to judge or move his legs and thereby does judge or move them, or that he judges or moves his legs by willing to do so. Such expressions may themselves need further analysis before the full truth is made explicit - causal statements have been notoriously difficult for philosophers to fathom. But they are at least roughly intelligible as they stand, and they carry with them no implication of a grossly mistaken metaphysics.

16. Still, there is a problem that arises when the will is thought of both as the power of favoring an action and that of causing an action to occur, or when choosing is equated both with preferring one of two alternative actions and with making the preferred alternative take place. The problem is that these seem clearly to be two different powers and two different actions - they are powers and actions, that is, of different kinds. And yet they are not seen to be two either by Aquinas or

by thinkers in the seventeenth century: it seems simply to be assumed that the will is one single power, and that willing or choosing is one single action. Aquinas says that powers of the soul are differentiated by the actions which are their exercises, and that these actions, in turn, are differentiated by their objects. Thus the understanding and the will are different powers because the objects of understanding and willing are different. And yet he says that the will is a single power even though it has two different exercises, simple willing and choosing. The reason he is not thereby violating his own identity criterion for powers is that although the objects of simple willing and choosing are different in a way - for the one is an end, the other a means to an end - this difference is not one of kind. Indeed the same individual thing - being healthy, for example - can serve both as a end and as a means, an end in one context, a means in another; so there need be no difference in kind between favoring an end and favoring a means. But there is such a difference between favoring something and causing it to come about. Aquinas, who assigned both these different functions to one and the same power of willing, must not have seen the difference or the nature of the difference between them. But it was seen by Locke, who says in the second edition of the *Essay* that he has changed his conception of choosing from what it had been in the first edition. In the second edition he likens choosing to “directing” and “ordering” or “as it were commanding” that something be done, and distinguishes it from desiring; whereas in the first he had assimilated choosing to preferring and made no distinction between choosing and desiring (*Essay* II.xxi.5, 15, 30; Edit 1: II.xxi.33).

17. How serious is this problem? This is a question that, as Locke would say, “I leave to be considered.” In any case, I think I have now said enough about the will for my purposes in this paper. I turn, therefore, to the three accounts of self-determination I wish to examine, starting with Bramhall’s.

18. Self-determinism is the doctrine that a free agent is one who determines himself, and conversely. Bramhall comes close to an explicit affirmation of this doctrine when he says, “It is

not inconsistent with true liberty [for an agent] to determine itself, but it is inconsistent with true liberty [for an agent] to be determined by another without itself” (*Defence* 1). Notice that in this statement, self-determination is made to be an attribute of an agent - indeed, as the context makes clear, of an individual human being. In other passages, Bramhall takes self-determination to be a relation between an agent and his will: a free agent is one who determines his own will (see, e.g., *Defence* 12 and 19). And sometimes he makes self-determination an attribute of the will of an agent: a free agent is one whose will determines itself.⁷ These different formulations are, I think, equivalent to one another: that one rather than another of them is used on a particular occasion is of no substantive significance.

19. What does it mean to determine oneself, according to Bramhall? To answer this we need to consider the sorts of things, other than oneself, that Bramhall takes to be capable of determining human agents or the wills thereof. There are three of these: first, “outward objects” and other agents, including God and the angels as well as other humans; second, the non-rational elements in the agent’s own soul, such as biological drives, “sensitive passions,” and imagination; and third, psychological factors that are rational - understanding, judgment, and will. We also need to distinguish two different sorts of determination, what Bramhall calls “natural” or “physical” on the one hand and “moral” on the other. And we need, finally, to keep in mind the distinction between an agent, properly so called, and the will of an agent.

20. Using these distinctions, we can state Bramhall’s position as follows. First, an agent is subject to natural determination by outward objects and by some of the non-rational elements in his own soul - his biological urges, for example - but not by others - his passions, for example - and not by any of the rational factors in his soul. Second, the will of an agent is subject to natural determination by God - who engages in such determination in “extraordinary” circumstances only - and by nothing else, whether external or within the soul. (This is the doctrine, affirmed by Aquinas as well as Bramhall, that the will by its nature “cannot be compelled.”⁸) Third, both

agents and their wills are subject to moral determination by outward objects, and to both non-rational and rational psychological factors. Fourth, whenever an agent or his will is naturally determined, then neither he nor it determines itself (nor does he determine his will).⁹ And fifth, whenever an agent or his will is morally determined, then he or it does determine itself (or he himself determines his will). Given the additional premise that a self-determined will or agent is the same with a free will or agent (which is the doctrine of self-determinism) it follows that a morally determined will or agent is a free will or agent. It also follows that a naturally determined will or agent is a not a free one.

21. There is more to Bramhall's position than this, however. He holds that a morally determined will or agent is a self-determined one, but this is not the only case of self-determination that he acknowledges. For it is entirely possible, he believes, for an agent (or his will) to go against everything that might morally determine him (or it), even "the last judgment of his own understanding." This is the voluntaristic element in Bramhall's thinking that I referred to earlier. And when an agent (or his will) does go against all these potentially determining factors, then again he (or it) is free, so that the equivalence of self-determination with freedom is preserved. That Bramhall does hold this voluntaristic position is shown by his endorsement of the "ordinary definition" of a free agent, according to which a free agent is one which, "when all things are present which are needful to produce the effect, can nevertheless not produce it." This definition, first formulated (I think) by the Jesuit Molina in the sixteenth century, was widely invoked by libertarians in Bramhall's time and after. Hobbes had charged that the definition "implies a contradiction and is nonsense," but Bramhall embraces it, making clear in the process that he includes "the last dictate of the understanding" within the scope of "all things present."¹⁰ One might think that an agent who does act against his own best judgment is not self-determined but rather undetermined, not determined in any way whatsoever. But for Bramhall the very fact that an agent acts at all makes him a determined agent (and his action a determined action). And

therefore, since there is nothing other than himself which does the determining, it must be his own self that accounts for it. Or so we can imagine Bramhall arguing.

22. Hobbes criticizes Bramhall's conception of freedom as self-determination on several grounds. First, he accuses Bramhall of speaking scholastic jargon about the will and understanding, and thus of hypostatizing and personifying these powers of the soul; but the use of those locutions, I have claimed, does not necessarily commit the speaker to that metaphysical mistake. Second, he argues that nothing can determine itself by appealing to the principle that "nothing takes beginning from itself"; but, as Hume showed, that sort of argument is question-begging. And third, Hobbes attacks Bramhall's notion of moral determination, at first remarking merely that he "understands not what [Bramhall] means by it" (LN 11), but then, after Bramhall has tried to explain himself - by saying, *inter alia*, that "the will is determined morally when some object is proposed to it with persuasive reasons and arguments to induce it to will" (*Defence* 11) - declaring that the term is "nonsense, unworthy of a man, nay, and if a beast could speak, unworthy of a beast, and can befall no creature whose nature is not depraved by doctrine" (QLNC 11). Here Hobbes goes too far, I think. There is something fishy about the idea of "moral determination": he is right about that. But there may be more to it than he allows for; and it would be worthwhile to examine it with more care. This too, however, is a matter that I leave to be considered.

23. Cudworth's self-determinism is both more complex and more original than Bramhall's.¹¹ Their conceptions of freedom, the freedom that both take to be requisite for moral agency, are not so different. Both Cudworth and Bramhall are incompatibilists: both deny that free agents and actions are possible in a world in which everything is governed by natural laws and forces necessitating the behavior of mere bodies, including brute animals. Human freedom or moral freedom is freedom from this kind of necessity. The two thinkers do differ on the relation of the intellectual activities of human beings to their actions, Bramhall denying and Cudworth affirming that an agent, in choosing what to do, is bound to follow his own judgment of what is best.¹² But

even so, Bramhall does not claim that one who does follow his judgment is not free, or is free in a different sense from that in which an agent who goes against his judgment is free. Where Cudworth and Bramhall part company is in their moral psychologies, their conceptions of the constitution and organization of the human soul. As to this, Bramhall follows the scholastics, and particularly Aquinas: he is a proponent of what Cudworth calls the “vulgarly received psychology.”¹³ Cudworth, by contrast, rejects the scholastic theory, and spends considerable effort in developing an alternative to it. It is here, in this alternative psychology, that Cudworth’s originality is most evident.

24. Cudworth never states the doctrine of self-determinism, as far as I know: he never explicitly says that an agent or action is free if and only if he or it is self-determined; much less does he argue for this doctrine. He merely assumes it from the outset, as a matter of vocabulary. For he uses locutions mentioning or connoting freedom interchangeably and in apposition with those mentioning or connoting self-determination - indeed he deploys an astonishing array of such locutions. For example, a being who has “freewill [*liberum arbitrium*],” whose actions have “contingent liberty” in them and are not all “absolutely and unavoidably necessary,” is also one who is “not altogether passive in [his] actings,” a being some of whose actions are “up to [himself] [*eph’ [autoi]*]” and “in [his] own power [*in [sua] potestate*],” and one who is “self-active” and “determines its own action” - a “self-determining” being (TFW I, II). And in one passage Cudworth refers to a “contingent liberty of self-determination” (TFW V). Furthermore, some of the arguments against “freewill” that Cudworth attacks are arguments whose specific target is the possibility of self-determination - that something could “move itself,” “act upon itself,” “determine its own actions,” or “determine itself” (TFW II).

25. Although Cudworth appears to believe that the identity of freedom with self-determination can be taken for granted, he recognizes that the existence or reality of freedom must be demonstrated, and he devotes considerable energy to this task. On the one hand he appeals to

“the instincts of nature” and to “common experience,” which he believes directly reveal that in many situations we are able to act independently, resisting pressures from the outside and from our own passions, and that we can set aside selfish interests so as to do the right or honest thing. On the other hand, he argues from our moral experience, or at least our moral convictions, that we must be free with respect to some of our actions, since if we were not, then praise and blame, reward and punishment, would be meaningless. The arguments against freedom that Cudworth attacks - or rather the arguments in favor of the inevitable necessity of all things, which is incompatible with freedom as he conceives it - are often drawn from Hobbes. Hobbes’s arguments, as I pointed out earlier, are question-begging. But the crucial premises in Cudworth’s counter-arguments are question-begging too, or at least would be thought to be by most compatibilists, not all of whom are Hobbesians. This fact, that many of the arguments on both sides of the dispute about freedom are question-begging, is one reason for the intractability of the dispute.

26. Cudworth presents his own account of the nature of the human soul as an alternative to, and an improvement on, the “vulgar theory” of the scholastics. He criticizes the scholastics for hypostatizing the powers of the soul, for conceiving them as distinct independent agents rather than as attributes of some other agent. But Cudworth’s more fundamental objection is that the scholastic theory restricts each of these distinct powers, and in particular the will and the understanding, to a single sort of action which it alone is able to perform. Thus “the understanding understandeth,” and “hath nothing of will in it,” and “the will willeth,” and has “nothing of understanding in it,” with the consequence that intellection is altogether “necessary,” and volition entirely “blind” (TFW V-VII). And with two such faculties as these, Cudworth concludes, it is impossible for any human agent to act either rationally or freely.

27. For Cudworth, by contrast, it is the soul itself (or, sometimes, the whole human being), that is the true human agent, and the proper subject of psychological phenomena. The soul, furthermore,

has an overriding unity that sets it apart from its various faculties and parts. Cudworth does not deny that the soul is internally complex; on the contrary, he spends a fair amount of time distinguishing and listing its different “powers and energies.” Many of these correspond quite closely to entries on the standard scholastic lists: sense, imagination, passions, conscience, and the understanding, both speculative and practical.¹⁴ But the most important such powers and energies for Cudworth are two that have no counterparts on the scholastic lists. One is that which “first moveth in the soul and setteth all [its] other wheels on work”; Cudworth later describes this as “a constant, restless, uninterrupted desire, or love of good as such,” and eventually refers to it, simply, as “plastic life.”¹⁵ The other is “the ruling, governing, commanding, determining principle in us,” what he also calls “the hegemonic of the soul” or simply “the hegemonicon” (TFW IX).¹⁶ Cudworth says that plastic life, the first of these energies and powers, is “necessary and natural in us,” as are all others listed earlier, including the understanding. But the hegemonicon, he maintains, is not necessary and natural. It is a free agent or power, which operates apart from and sometimes in defiance of the bounds of nature. Above all, it is a “self-active,” “self-forming,” and “self-determining” agent or power.

28. The hegemonicon within each human soul is the central and most distinctive feature of Cudworth’s moral psychology. Unfortunately, it is not at all clear just what this hegemonicon is. We are told clearly enough what it is supposed to do, what at least some of its functions and properties are. It is that which accounts for the soul’s, or the human being’s, freedom, its or his independence, unity, and even identity. But the language Cudworth uses to ascribe these characteristics to it, though copious, is often vague, loose, metaphorical,¹⁷ and even syntactically ill-formed.¹⁸ Furthermore, this language, when it does suggest something definite, is suggestive in two contrary directions. A moment ago, I characterized Cudworth’s hegemonicon as “an agent or power.” The fact is that some things he says of it imply the one, and some the other: sometimes he says it is the power of freewill, for example, sometimes that it has this power. Most

perplexing of all is the relation of the hegemonicon to the soul itself. In the *Treatise of Freewill*, “the hegemonic of the soul” is first introduced as one among the soul’s several “energies and powers,” at least distinguishable from the others and often, as the soul’s “ruling principle,” coming into conflict with them. But then later - and repeatedly afterwards - Cudworth speaks as if the hegemonicon just is the soul itself, or rather the soul under some description, or from some point of view, in some role or guise, or subject to some qualification, for he says that it is the soul *as such and such*, as in the following passage: “[the hegemonicon] in every man ... is the soul as comprehending itself, all its concerns and interests, its abilities and capacities, and holding itself, as it were in its own hand, as it were redoubled upon itself, having a power of intending or exerting itself more or less in consideration and deliberation,” and so on for several more lines (TFW X). Could anyone tell, from this passage, what sort of thing the hegemonicon is supposed to be, and what relation it bears to the soul or man “in” which it is? How should such passages be “reformulated” in language that is literal, precise, and metaphysically perspicuous?

29. I turn now to Locke. It might seem odd to count him as a proponent of self-determinism and so to associate him with Bramhall and Cudworth. Certainly Locke’s conception of freedom is very different from theirs. They are indeterminists, whereas he is a determinist;¹⁹ hence, whatever else he thinks about freedom, he must conceive it in such wise that it is compatible with universal causal necessitation. This does not mean that Locke is simply a Hobbesian regarding freedom. For Hobbes, all that is needed to be a free agent is that one be able to do what one wills to do, so that any voluntary action that actually occurs is a free action. But for Locke, this condition, though necessary, is not sufficient. To be free an agent must also be able not to do what he does; and an action is free only if it is avoidable as well as voluntary. This added condition of avoidability, or of being able to do otherwise, is one that incompatibilists such as Bramhall and Cudworth insist on; and they hold that it cannot be satisfied if determinism is true. Locke must disagree on this last point, since he is a determinist. Unfortunately, he never addresses the

question how an agent can do anything other than what he does do, if everything that happens is antecedently determined. But Locke is nonetheless firm in his conviction that avoidability is required for freedom.²⁰

30. As for the connection between freedom and self-determination, there are several passages in which Locke explicitly states it. One occurs in Book IV of the *Essay* where, in a discussion of reasoning, he gives an example of an inference that he obviously takes to be sound. This starts from the premise that “men shall be punished in another world” and proceeds to the conclusion that “men can determine themselves”; the intermediate step from which this conclusion is finally drawn, Locke explains, is the proposition that “men have freedom.”²¹ Another such passage occurs in Book II, in the chapter “Of Power,” where the bulk of Locke’s discussion of freedom and of motivation takes place. Here Locke declares that every man must, “as an intelligent being,” “be determined in willing by his own thought and judgment, what is best for him to.” If a man were not so determined, Locke goes on, “he would be under the determination of some other than himself, which is want of liberty” (*Essay* II.xxi.48). From the last statement quoted it follows that to have liberty is to be under the determination of oneself - that is, to determine oneself - and this gives us the connection between freedom and self-determination.²² But the first statement informs us as well what Locke conceives self-determination to be. An agent is self-determined if and only if he is “determined in willing by his own thought and judgment, what is best for him to do.”

31. Locke’s account of self-determination is thus different from those of both Bramhall and Cudworth. To understand these differences, however, we need to review some of the main features of his moral psychology, and in particular his theory of motivation, for in this too Locke differs from his predecessors. The first thing to note is that for Locke the expression “the agent is determined in willing” is equivalent to “the agent’s will is determined”; the latter indeed is the expression he most often uses in his discussion of motivation. In this way, Locke gives the will a

significant role in his account, just as Bramhall does. Also like Bramhall, Locke holds that agents determine their own wills, for he says that “to the question, what is it determines the will? the true and proper answer is, the mind”; and Locke, again like Bramhall, and like Cudworth too, shifts back and forth between making the mind (or soul) and the man the proper agent of human actions. But this, for Locke, is not the end of the matter, for there is a further question that may and in some cases must be raised. This is the question, as he puts it, “What moves the mind, in every particular instance, to determine its general power of directing [sc. its power of willing] to this or that particular [action]?” (*Essay* II.xxi.29). For Cudworth and Bramhall this further question is out of place, at least in those cases in which an agent determines his own will (or the will or the hegemonicon determines itself). For in such cases there is no more to be known about why an agent chooses as he does, beyond that he himself makes the choice. For Locke, however, this further question is always appropriate; often indeed there is no explanation of an agent’s behavior until it is both asked and answered. Having introduced this further question, Locke indicates that henceforth he will take it to be the meaning of the original question, What determines the will?, which he goes on to discuss at considerable length.

32. What, then, determines the will? It is always, Locke says, “some present uneasiness the agent is under” (*Essay* II.xxi.29 ff.). By “uneasiness” he means an occurrent feeling, which either is or is constantly joined with desire. This uneasiness or desire is distinguished not only from willing, which it causes, but from judging and every other action of the understanding. It is true that desire presupposes some cognitive activity on the part of the subject: one cannot desire something without being aware of it, and also without thinking it good in some way. But desiring something, and judging it to be good or desirable, are two different things: one often judges that to be good which one has no appetite for whatsoever. Indeed that fact, so prominent in cases of *akrasia*, is one of the reasons Locke changed his account of motivation in the second edition of the *Essay*. For it was only in that edition that he put forward the view that uneasiness is that

which determines the will. In the first edition he had held that the will is determined by what is good - or rather, as he came to explain it, by one's apprehension or judgment of something as good: in other words, by some action on the part of the understanding. Note that in the second edition account, which is what I am in the course of expounding, Locke is not merely claiming that the will is sometimes determined by uneasiness. His claim is that the will is never determined by anything but uneasiness.

33. But if it is always uneasiness that determines the will, and uneasiness is, as Locke holds, a manifestation of our sensitive or emotional nature, how is it possible for an agent to be determined in willing by his own thought and judgment, and so to determine himself? This is possible, Locke answers, because the uneasinesses one feels, one's desires and emotional proclivities, can themselves be determined by one's intellectual states. Such determination is not full or perfect: I cannot always make myself feel hunger just by thinking of food, or stop feeling hunger by thinking of something else. But I can do this sometimes, and a change in my beliefs sometimes does lead to changes in my desires, eventually if not right away. Nor does one feel uneasiness only in response to some intellectual proceeding - a judgment or inference or even a bare apprehension of some obvious truth. For desires arise naturally in our souls, Locke believes, and from physical factors we respond to without even noticing them. His point is that our judgments have some influence sometimes upon our desires: they are capable, as he puts it, of "raising" uneasinesses in us.

34. One situation in which desires are affected by judgments, the one that most interests Locke, is that in which an agent is beset with several divergent desires all at once, all competing to determine his will in different directions. In this situation, Locke observes, the agent often is able to suspend these desires, thereby preventing his will from being determined by any of them. And once he does that, he is able "to consider the objects of [these desires], examine them on all sides, and weigh them with others" (*Essay* II.xxi.47). He is able, that is, to deliberate, and as a result

may well change his beliefs as to which of the various things he desires would be best for him to pursue and attain. And that in turn may affect his desires, raising some new ones, extinguishing some of the old ones, and adjusting the relative strengths of those that remain - following which, when the suspension is lifted, the will of the agent is determined in a different direction from that it would have gone in had he not suspended his original desires and engaged in deliberation.

35. So when Locke says that an agent is determined in willing by his own thought and judgment, what he means is that thought and judgment determine his desires and that these desires then and in consequence determine his will. Thus thought and judgment themselves determine the will indirectly, by the intermediation of desire. But even though indirect, the human ability to be so determined, Locke says, is a perfection of our nature as rational beings. Since, given his thesis of self-determinism, to have this ability is just to have freedom, to be a free agent, it follows that free agency too, for Locke, is a perfection of our nature as rational beings.

36. But now a problem arises for Locke's theory. Even if human agents do, as he says, have the power to suspend their desires on occasion, to engage in deliberation and thereby reach new judgments as to what they should do, which judgments then bring about new desires which in turn determine their wills - even if all this is true - it still is not clear how this initial suspension is supposed to occur. Locke certainly conceives such suspension to be a voluntary act on the part of an agent; but if it is, then it must be produced by an act of volition, and that means there must be a desire to suspend which precedes and causes that volition. But how does the agent come to have that desire? It may be the product of an earlier judgment, which itself came about through a process of deliberation engaged in after an earlier act of suspension on the part of the same agent. But to take that path seems to lead us into an infinite regress. On the other hand the desire may have come to exist in the agent by natural causes, causes in which neither his will nor his intellect is involved and over which he has no control. But in that case, it is hard to see how any action brought about by a volition determined by that desire could count as a free action, one with

respect to which the agent determines himself. For it is hard to see how any action so determined could be one that the agent could have avoided.

37. Perhaps there is some way of resolving this problem, and thus of saving Locke's theory. I am not now prepared to maintain, with any finality, either that there is or that there is not.²³ In any case, my aim in this paper has been less to pronounce judgment on the views I have been examining than to explicate their content.²⁴

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NOTES

¹ The distinction here is analogous to Aquinas's distinction between exercising and specifying an act of the will. The self-determiner both exercises his capacity for action, thus causing an action to exist, and specifies his action, thus causing it to be of some specific kind. See § 9 below.

² In the seventeenth century a few philosophers - Descartes notably - made judging an exercise of the will rather than the intellect, though they maintained the distinction between will and intellect, and still regarded conceiving and reasoning as cognitive actions; see Descartes, *Meditations* IV and VI. Theirs was not the dominant position, however.

³ This, again, was the dominant position in the seventeenth century. But Hobbes denied the existence of rational appetite; for him, all appetite is sensory, and will is a species of sensory desire; see Hobbes, *Leviathan* VI.

⁴ LN 20: "But as it is absurdly said, that to dance is an act allured or drawn by fair means out of the ability to dance; so is it also to say, that to will is an act allured or drawn out of the power to will, which power is commonly called the will" (Hobbes here is targeting more than one of Bramhall's ways of speaking); TFW VII: "For to attribute the act of intellection and perception to the faculty of understanding, and acts of volition to the faculty of will, or to say that it is the understanding that understandeth, and the will that willeth - this is all one as if one should say that the faculty of walking walketh, and the faculty of speaking speaketh, or that the musical faculty playeth a lesson upon the lute, or sings this or that tune. ... it is really the man or soul that understands, and the man or soul that wills, as it is the man that walks and the man that speaks or talks, and the musician that plays a lesson on the lute."

⁵ See ST IaIIae.vi.1 for Aquinas's characterization of the will as *principium actionem*; IaIIae.vi.4 for his distinction between *actus elicited* and *actus imperatus*.

⁶ See ST Iae.lxxx.2 and IaIIae.ix.1 for "The will is a moved mover" and Iae.lxxxii.4 and IaIIae.ix.1 for "The will moves ... the other powers of the soul."

⁷ See *Defence* 17. Indeed, what he actually says in this passage is that “the will [of a free agent] determine[s] itself freely.”

⁸ Bramhall, *Defence* 19 and 30; cf. Aquinas, ST Iae.lxxxiii.1 and IaIIae.vi.4. There are, however, two passages in which Bramhall appears to say otherwise - appears, that is, to allow that the will can be compelled, not by God, which Bramhall makes an exception of in any case, but by natural factors. One of these occurs in § 23 of the Discourse, where he says of the will, that even if it “did necessarily follow the last dictate of the understanding, *as certainly in many things it doth*, yet ... this is no extrinsic determination from without” (italics added). The other is in § 20 of the same work, where he compares the case of a “strong man” who forces a weaker one to “kill a third person” by “holding [his] hand” with that of the same strong man who, having “the will of the weaker in his power as well as the hand, ... not only incline[s] but determine[s] it secretly and insensibly to commit this act”; are not, Bramhall rhetorically asks, the two cases “the same”? I see no way of making these two passages consistent with the rest of Bramhall’s text.

⁹ When an agent does determine himself, is the determination natural or moral? Does it have to be one or the other, or is there a third form of determination that is neither? These are not questions that Bramhall addresses.

¹⁰ See Molina, *Concordia* 2.3; Hobbes, LN 32; Bramhall, *Defence* 32.

¹¹ Cudworth wrote voluminously on the subject of freewill. Not all of these writings have survived, and the volume even of those that have is large, comprising five substantial manuscripts now held by the British Library: these are Additional MSS 4978, 4979, 4980, 4981, and 4982. Only one of these manuscripts has been published, the so-called *Treatise of Freewill*, and that is the main basis of my account of Cudworth’s position in this paper. I have also read portions of MSS 4980, 4981, and 4982, and have drawn a few bits from them, though I have not found the views expressed in them to differ at all significantly from those expressed in the published *Treatise*.

¹² One place where this difference is manifest is in their different stances with respect to the Molinist definition of a free agent as one who, “*Positis omnibus ..., potest agere vel non agere,*” Bramhall accepting, Cudworth rejecting it. See Bramhall, *Defence* 32; Cudworth, MS 4981, Appendix.

¹³ See TFW V. This is not to say that Bramhall accepts Aquinas’s intellectualist view of the relation between the understanding and the will; he is, on the contrary, a voluntarist on the model of Molina, as we have also seen.

¹⁴ More fully, for example, “the perceptions of the outward sense and of bodily pleasure and [pain]”; “then fancy or imagination, sudden passions and *hormae*, and commotions called concupiscible and irascible”; next and “above all these ... the dictate of honesty, commonly called the dictate of conscience”; and “lastly, the understanding, both the speculative understanding ... and the practical” (TFW VIII).

¹⁵ TFW VIII. By using the term “plastic life,” Cudworth is no doubt alluding to his doctrine of the “plastic life of nature,” developed at some length in his *True Intellectual System of the Universe*, Chap. III, § xxxvii.

¹⁶ This term was used by the Stoics, whose doctrines Cudworth often mentions; its literal meaning is “ruling principle.” But however the Stoics understood this principle, Cudworth’s conception of it is far from clear; see § 28 below.

¹⁷ As when he says that the hegemonicon is “the soul as ... holding itself ... in its own hand.”

¹⁸ As is, I believe, the term “self-power” - for one example.

¹⁹ That is, he holds not only that every non-eternal being “is produced by something” other than itself, but that whatever has “its being and beginning from another, must also have all that which is in, and belongs to its being from another too” (*Essay* IV.xii.3-4).

²⁰ This is the point of his famous locked room example; see *Essay* II.xxi.10. But apart from this,

there are many passages in which he states this requirement explicitly; see *Essay* II.xxi.8, 11, 27.

²¹ *Essay* IV.xvii.4. Locke does not actually state the proposition that “men have freedom” in this passage. For he is claiming that the inference proceeds via the mind’s grasp of logical connections between ideas rather than between propositions. The ideas in question at this stage of the inference are “freedom” and “self-determination”; but to arrive at the idea of self-determination, Locke supposes, is the same as to conclude that “men determine themselves,” which proposition he then actually states.

²² Strictly speaking, all that follows from this statement is that self-determination is necessary for freedom. But I am sure that Locke took the connection to hold in the other direction as well - that he took self-determination to be sufficient as well as necessary for freedom.

²³ I discuss a similar problem in another paper (Chappell 1998), but I offer no solution to that one either.

²⁴ Versions of this paper were read at meetings of the Seventeenth-Century Philosophy Research Group at Kings College London in November 1998 and the Midwest Seminar in the History of Early Modern Philosophy at the University of Chicago in March 1999, and at the University of Akron in March 1999. I am grateful to my auditors on those occasions for many helpful suggestions.

