

least one yet more striking example of the same kind. The question of the freedom of the human will has, I believe, raged for centuries. It cannot yet be said that any conclusion has been reached. Indeed I have heard it admitted by men of high intellectual attainments that the question was insoluble. Now a curious feature of this dispute is that none of the combatants, at least on the affirmative side, have made any serious attempt to define what should be meant by the phrase freedom of the will, except by using such terms as require definition equally with the word freedom itself. It can, I conceive, be made quite clear that the assertion, "The will is free," is one without meaning, until we analyze more fully the different meanings to be attached to the word free. Now this word has a perfectly well-defined signification in every day life. We say that anything is free when it is not subject to external constraint. We also know exactly what we mean when we say that a man is free to do a certain act. We mean that if he chooses to do it there is no external constraint acting to prevent him. In all cases a relation of two things is implied in the word, some active agent or power, and the presence or absence of another constraining agent. Now, when we inquire whether the will itself is free, irrespective of external constraints, the word free no longer has a meaning, because one of the elements implied in it is ignored.

To inquire whether the will itself is free is like inquiring whether fire itself is consumed by the burning, or whether clothing is itself clad. It is not, therefore, at all surprising that both parties have been able to dispute without end, but it is a most astonishing phenomenon of the human intellect that the dispute should go on generation after generation without the parties finding out whether there was really any difference of opinion between them on the subject. I venture to say that if there is any such difference, neither party has ever analyzed the meaning of the words used sufficiently far to show it. The daily experience of every man, from his cradle to his grave, shows that human acts are as much the subject of external causal influences as are the phenomena of nature. To dispute this would be little short of the ludicrous. All that the opponents of freedom, as a class, have ever claimed, is the assertion of a causal connection between the acts of the will, and influences independent of the will. True, propositions of this sort can be expressed in a variety of ways connoting an endless number of more or less objectionable ideas, but this is the substance of the matter.