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► **To cite this version:**

Laurent Jaffro, Raphaële Espiet-Kilty. Cudworth on Moral Freedom. *Revue philosophique de Louvain*, 2009, 107 (4), pp.647-673. 10.2143/RPL.107.4.2044679 . halshs-00437075

HAL Id: halshs-00437075

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00437075>

Submitted on 4 Jun 2023

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Trad. anglaise par Raphaële Espiet-Kilty (UCA) du brouillon de
 Laurent JAFFRO, « Liberté morale et causalité selon Ralph Cudworth », *Revue
 Philosophique de Louvain*, 107, 4 (2009), p. 647-673.

Cudworth on Moral Freedom

Summary: According to Cudworth, the issue of freedom and necessity on which Hobbes and Bramhall were opposed can be resolved against Hobbesian necessitarianism if a sound theory of practical deliberation is used. The main thesis of this paper is that this theory is dispositional. To be free does not mean to directly and at leisure control one's own volitions, but entails, at a much deeper level than that of the causal "train" (Hobbes's word) of psychological states, trying to develop dispositions that make the soul capable of striving for good. This paper shows that this conception of moral freedom, which is very different from the Lockean conception of freedom and which gains from being compared, rather than opposed, to the Cartesian conception, takes root in Plotinus. The dispositional theory helps circumvent the Humean argument against the authority of reason in moral matters.

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A conception of freewill as "a power over oneself" can be found in the Cambridge Platonist Ralph Cudworth (1617-1688). Its central characteristic is to completely identify freedom with moral self-control. This paper presents this conception and shows that it is rooted in a dispositional theory of deliberation. The key sources used are *A Treatise of Freewill*, the manuscript published by John Allen in 1838¹, and other manuscripts on the same subject quoted by Anne Thévenet in a Ph.D Thesis. Cudworth only intervened in the debate on the "liberty of action", as it is summarized in the discussion between Thomas Hobbes and John Bramhall, to show, against Hobbes but also against the radical Calvinists, that there exists a "moral freewill"².

¹ British Library, Add. Man. 4978.

² For an overview of the freewill debate from Hobbes to the Scottish school, see Harris J., 2005.

The claim is rather exotic since contemporary philosophy as well as early modern authors, such as Hobbes and Descartes, who examined the questions of freedom and of causality, believe it to be *primarily* a matter for metaphysics not morality³. It is manifestly not required to understand what is acting well first to understand what is acting. Thus, Thomas Pink recently proposed a refutation of Hobbes's thesis – for whom the freedom to act does not stem from the freedom to decide to act – by means of an argument that calls upon the idea of rational self-determination, according to which freedom of action encompasses a freedom of will, more precisely a freedom of deliberation and of decision. Superficially, Pink's argument is the same as various conceptions whose common thread is to argue that we exert control over our actions through the intermediary of the control of our will and more generally of some of our mental states. But Pink remains extremely distant from Cudworth and Bishop Bramhall when he takes up the torch of anti-Hobbism. Indeed, when he presents his work, he makes sure to recall what, for a generation of philosophers, has become a truth that is as little questioned as the prejudice it replaced:

As a book about our freedom, *The Psychology of Freedom* is not also a book about moral responsibility and blameworthiness. As Harry Frankfurt has reminded us, to be morally responsible for our actions is one thing, and to be a free agent – to have control over whether or not we perform them – is another. (Pink T., 1996, p. 12)

The discovery according to which moral responsibility does not presuppose the principle of alternative possibilities is enough for Pink to justify his refusal to “moralise the theory of freedom”. Frankfurt's counter-examples show, amongst other things, that for persons to be held morally responsible for their action it is not necessary for them to have had the possibility to act otherwise (Frankfurt H., 1969). In this respect, the distance between Frankfurt's conception of freedom and that of the Cambridge Platonists is considerable. However, as we shall see, it is not exactly where expected. Cudworth certainly belongs to those authors who argued that for an agent to be held morally responsible for such and such action he/she accomplished, it is necessary for him/her to have had the possibility to act otherwise or not at all. However, according to Cudworth, it is one of the necessary conditions, although not a sufficient one, of moral responsibility, which requires, in addition, the third condition of moral freedom, which will be explained later.

³ I do not deny that, for those authors, there are strong connections between metaphysics and ethics; my claim is just that when they discuss freewill *pro* (Descartes) or *contra* (Hobbes), ethical matters are not directly under consideration.

Moreover it would be proper to define at which level of action and deliberation these conditions of freedom apply. The way I understand Cudworth, these conditions do not apply directly at the level of the occurrences of mental states, but rather at the level of the dispositions that prepare those occurrences. The main aim of this paper is to show that Cudworth's thesis would be very fragile if it pretended that these conditions apply at the first level; instead it introduces a deeper level.

The contemporary reader's surprise at the way Cudworth intermingles all parts of philosophy regardless of the distinctions that it would be necessary to make (first of all between moral philosophy and the philosophy of action), probably stems from the fact that philosophy, from the point of view of the analytical tradition, has a pedigree – perhaps one should even say paradigm (Foot Ph., 1990) – which dates back to Hobbes and which was to be followed by authors who agreed to give the primary role, a causal one, to desire, and to strongly dissociate the analysis of action, with all its ingredients – deliberation, decision, motivation – from moral considerations. But precisely, if Cudworth does not subscribe to this type of distinctions, it is because he believes that they rest on a mistake, and this is what I will try to explain later, by showing that Cudworth was aware of the considerable change in conception which he was proposing. By rejecting the Hobbesian theory of deliberation, Cudworth does away with the whole of the conativist paradigm. It would be wrong to see weakness or naivety where there is, on the contrary, a controversial philosophical position that is fully claimed. It is only by accepting this that it becomes possible to acknowledge what he calls “moral freedom”.

The three conditions of moral freedom

It is necessary to start with the issue of the type of causality that is at play in human action, which leads to the questions of the necessity or the freedom of the action and, above all, of the decision that initiates it. As I have already said, these are questions that Cudworth does not separate from the question of the responsibility of the agent over his/her actions and the question of the moral value of the action. There is a double link between these two series of questions, since, for Cudworth (1) it is through moral experience and notably the experience of responsibility, appreciation, and punishment, that freedom is apprehended; (2) there is a conceptual link between freedom and morality in that morality is conditioned by freedom and that the function of freedom – its true use – is inversely to make us moral.

Let us recall a thesis held notably in Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding*. An act is voluntary if and only if it is directly caused by the will of the agent to accomplish it. Furthermore, an act is free if and only if, firstly it is voluntary; and secondly if the agent had the possibility to act otherwise, *i.e.* to do something else or to abstain from doing anything. The alternative action needs to be physically available for the agent. As Locke writes,

It is carefully to be remembered, that freedom consists in the dependence of the existence, or not existence of any action, upon our volition of it, and not in the dependence of any action, or its contrary, on our preference. A man standing on a cliff, is at liberty to leap twenty yards downwards into the sea, not because he has a power to do the contrary action, which is to leap twenty yards upwards, for that he cannot do: but he is therefore free because he has a power to leap or not to leap. But if a greater force than his, either holds him fast, or tumbles him down, he is no longer free in that case: because the doing, or forbearance of that particular action, is no longer in his power. (Locke, 1975, II, xxi, 27, p. 247-8)

A free action is an action that is accomplished voluntarily in such a context that the alternative action was really do-able. It is one characterization of the conditions of freedom. I leave aside whether these conditions of freedom are enough to also constitute, for Locke, the conditions of moral responsibility. I believe that moral responsibility presupposes something more and that, for its better understanding, it would be necessary to examine the statements in the *Essay concerning the freedom to suspend assent* and also concerning the duty we have (in as far as we are God's creatures) to use our faculties in order to know, to believe and to act in a reasonable way (See Glauser R., 2003); but the object of this paper is not to take up again the debated question of the ethics of belief in Locke and of its impact on the philosophy of action.

Cudworth also formulates, at the beginning of his *Treatise of Freewill* the two conditions under which an action can be free in terms that are very close to Locke's:

When we blame a man for any wicked actions, as for taking away another man's life, either by perjury or by wilful murder; we blame him not only as doing otherwise than ought to have been done, but also than he might have done, and that it was possible for him to have avoided it, so that he was himself the cause of the evil thereof. (Cudworth, 1838, p. 1)

It can be thus summarised: agent X has freely accomplished ϕ (where ϕ is an action) if and only if (1) X is the author of ϕ in so far as he/she has accomplished ϕ because he/she willed it and (2) X could have decided not to accomplish ϕ . But it is noticeable that the argument in the *Treatise of Freewill* goes further than this position. Indeed Cudworth argues that this characterisation of freedom is incomplete: it provides us with necessary conditions, but not sufficient ones. A third condition is needed to fully account for what freedom is. This third condition is precisely the one through which the theory of freedom is "moralised".

There needs to be added the clause according to which (3) the accomplishment of φ is not axiologically equal to the non-accomplishment of φ .

There can be no just blame or dispraise, but only where the objects, being in themselves really unequal, the one better, the other worse, a man refuseth the better and chooseth the worse. (Cudworth, 1838, p. 18)

This third condition concerns the type of object or reality the choice deals with. A choice that is made between two perfectly equal things is not, for Cudworth, a demonstration of freedom as he means it, *i.e.* of moral freedom. Cudworth gives the example of someone who could choose between two eggs. As he decides to choose one, though the other one was also available, a Lockean might say that the action that consisted in taking this egg was free. Cudworth denies this analysis for the reason that the third condition was not met. It is important to specify that the inequality between things, that here is lacking, is an inequality of value in the moral meaning of the word. It is not an inequality of importance or consequence. The *Treatise of Freewill* is about the decision concerning values – which Cudworth considers with a realistic conception – and it is only in this light that it is about freedom. It is noticeable, incidentally, that Cudworth argues from the experience of praise and blame. Let us consider briefly this method which is not without problems.

The phenomenological argument

Let us call “phenomenology” a reasoned description of the way we feel and commonly understand what happens in our everyday experience. What phenomenology teaches us does not necessarily coincide with what psychology and ontology teach us, *i.e.* the theory of mental processes that are really involved in this experience and the theory of objects that, through it, we have access to. Phenomenology is not enough to prove the theses that will be put forward in the theory. But there is no contradiction either between the phenomenology and the psychological and ontological theories that will be developed. The description of this experience does point towards the theories without, for all that, constituting a proof.

The *Treatise of Freewill* begins with a phenomenology of freedom. Cudworth does not suppose a perfect coincidence between what the description of the experience of freedom teaches us and what the correct philosophical theory teaches us, but he seeks clues for the theory from the phenomenology. “We seem clearly to be led by the instincts of nature to think that there is something ἐφ’ ἡμῖν, *in nostra potestate*, in our own power.” (Cudworth, 1838, p. 1) We do not treat nor do we consider animal behaviour in the same way we do human

actions. We consider the latter as free and we treat them as such, through, notably, praise or blame towards the agent as the author of the action. The expression “instinct of nature” designates the preconception, the spontaneous representation, both common and ordinary, that we have of freedom. The best examples of these “anticipations” – the term translates the Stoic προλήψεις – of freedom can be found in the experience of feeling remorse or repent as well as in that of punishment. Amongst the common moral intuitions, there is thus the premonition of a redistributive or vengeful justice: it punishes in proportion to the crime. Hobbes claimed that necessitarianism does not deprive redistributive justice of its basis because the latter has a deterrent function, with regards future actions; Cudworth argues that punishments are related to past actions and to a deliberate crime (Cudworth, 1838, p. 2-3). According to him, if human actions are necessary, there is no longer any divine justice.

The existence of the preconception does not prove that we are free, but it proves that we have such a representation of freedom. To know whether this representation is correct is another matter. This is how I understand Cudworth’s argument. He does not explicitly say that preconception does not prove freedom, which is why it is easy for the reader to shift from one point to the other. The shift is made even easier by the fact that nature is well made, so that it is clear that preconception is globally correct, *i.e.* that our common representation of freedom is a lot truer than that which some philosophers have proposed, such as Hobbes.

It is very important, however, to understand that the preconception of freedom is not a proof of freedom. Otherwise, there would be a serious *petitio principii*. Let us, in fact, consider these two propositions:

- (1) For us to repent from an action we have to have accomplished it freely.
- (2) It is the case we repent for some of our actions.

It is not possible to put forward proposition (2) as a proof of thesis (1) for we may not deduce anything from proposition (2) with regards the action without presupposing a decision concerning what is in question. Thesis (1) must be proved with something else than the sole experience of repent.

The relation between preconception and the correct theory is not one of proof, but of suggestion. It is the same relation as that between Christian Revelation and the doctrine of human freedom. Cudworth, indeed, puts preconception and revelation on equal footing (Cudworth, 1838, p. 5). Nevertheless, it is not certain Cudworth totally escapes *petitio principii*. The experience of praise and blame, or that of reward or punishment, in his writing, are supposed not only to suggest but also to substantiate the reality of values.

Against necessitarianism: the assertion of contingency

The second part of the account concerns the objection, essentially taken from Hobbes with the convertibility of the sufficient and the necessary causes as well as his other arguments such as those against contingent futures. It is at this point that Cudworth shifts from the consideration of clues to reasons and arguments. The objections taken from Hobbes against the existence of “contingent liberty”: that is to say of the form of freewill that does not mean having the ability to choose a good from a bad, but a capacity to settle arbitrarily and indifferently, at random, between two parties. It is important to insist on the disposition – in the rhetorical meaning of the term – to which Cudworth resorts: the Hobbesian objections he presents are not against the form of freedom he means to defend, *i.e.* moral freedom, but against an imperfect form, contingent freedom, the existence of which he postulates, but that is soon to become a foil. Cudworth proceeds to a *modus tollens*: here he defends the existence of contingent freedom because Hobbesian necessitarianism results in denying its possibility (Cudworth, 1743, vol. 1, p. 40).

The thesis of the imperfection of contingent freedom is quite different from the thesis of the absence of contingency in the world that Cudworth refuses to subscribe for fear of falling into necessitarianism. To admit that there is a contingent freedom is the price to pay for presenting moral freedom as a capacity to self-determination. He who can do the most can do the least. If the freedom to be indifferent was impossible, moral freedom, which is a better use of freedom, would also be. Here, as in many other instances, Cudworth draws his inspiration from the Cartesian idea of degrees of perfection in the use of freedom. It is necessary to insist on the role played by the thesis that asserts the existence of a certain contingency in the world, even though Cudworth refuses to reduce freedom to what he calls contingent freedom.

In the *True Intellectual System of the Universe*, Cudworth strongly rejects stoic fatalism, which he puts in the same theological bag as Calvinism. However, simultaneously, he takes up the stoic doctrine of freedom of the will, or more precisely, freedom of internal resolution, of assent. One might be surprised by the fact that Cudworth seems to ignore that the stoic conception of resolution or hegemonic, more generally the stoic conception of judgement and all the stoic moral psychology, is not only compatible with the thesis of destiny, but actually inseparable from it, for to be free for a stoic is to control one’s representations so that destiny is perfectly and willingly accepted. Yet, Cudworth asserts the existence of an objective contingency in the world, which invalidates the Stoics’ thesis of destiny. In fact, Cudworth does not simply take up a stoic version of the doctrine of freedom of the will, rather he greatly

transforms it by making it the principle of freedom of action – or, more specifically, by anchoring the freedom of action in the freedom of the will differently from Stoics. What the hegemonic achieves is not only the control of representations and the discipline of judgement, it is directly the control of action, in the sense that the very production of the action depends upon it. One could object that already amongst the Stoics the control of action depends on the control of representations, however, it should be said that it is only because everything depends on the evaluations made by the ruling faculty. For Cudworth, the link between freedom of the will and freedom of action is much stronger, for it is not only that action depends on self-control, it is, above all, that action is literally produced by the ruling faculty. The hegemonic is the faculty of self-activity, the very elaborate form of self-movement that, in spiritual substances, is responsible for the introduction of contingency in the world (see Thévenet A., 2007, p. 44 – this development of the question of contingency owes a lot to this work).

In other words, if Cudworth can take up what looks very like the stoic doctrine of freedom at the same time as rejecting the stoic doctrine of destiny, even though Stoics presented freedom as the acceptance of destiny, it is because he asserts that certain events are contingent. These are the actions which are initiated by autokinetic substances. If it is action that is directly at hand as an event of the world, and not just our representations, it is because we are substances capable of initiating actions (Thévenet A., 2007, p. 265-6). It is spiritual causality that introduces this contingency. Cudworthian freedom is not an acceptance of destiny, but a production of contingency – at least at first sight, for at a deeper degree, that of the relation between the will and the good, it proves to be the free acceptance of necessity again.

Such a conception of freedom of the will entails adhesion to the principle of alternative possibilities. If the will is genuinely free only if it is capable of producing an action that would not be produced had it not been willed, *i.e.* if the condition of freedom of the will is not only to have the ability, so to speak, to will oneself to will, but that it should be that background will that leads to acting, *i.e.* if freedom of action is rooted in the freedom of the will, then, it is necessary to adhere to the principle according to which one of the conditions of the freedom of such an action is that it may not happen, that is to say, is contingent, because it depends on the will for its production.

That is why Cudworth puts forward two controversial theses, simultaneously and on two fronts: (1) Against Hobbes and alongside Bishop Bramhall he asserts that there is not freedom of action without freedom of the will. (2) Against the Stoics, based on a, perhaps,

restrictive representation of stoic freedom, Cudworth asserts that there is no freedom of the will without freedom of action. No freedom of action without freedom of the will, no freedom of the will without freedom of action: both freedoms conditioning each other reciprocally. In short, freedom is a new type of causality, generically different from heterokinetic causality.

Freedom is the production of contingency from the point of view of external actions, but, at a deeper level, it remains an acceptance of necessity. As far as it involves the dynamic relation of the soul towards good, the soul cannot not will the good (if it prefers an evil, it is that it believes it is a good). At this level, the principle of alternative possibilities is no longer associated with the idea of freedom. Indeed, the soul not being capable of willing an evil, it is not true that it is free to will the good because it could also will the evil. So the stoic conception of freedom, as a free acceptance of necessity, comes back, in a certain manner, when it comes to thinking of the search for moral good by the soul.

A dispositional conception of deliberation

Cudworth distinguishes between two freedoms: the simply rational or animal freedom (“a power of deliberating according to inferior reasons”⁴) and the superior rational and moral freedom:

There is a higher redoubled self-activity of liberum arbitrium in humane souls which we call freewill morall which not only respects external actions and their utility or inutility, but the inward dispositions of the mind in which morall goodness [...] properly consists. (MSS 4980 f. 10, quoted by Thévenet A., 2007, p. 129)

Hobbes reduced freewill to the first freedom, whereas in man, who is not only an animal, a superior form of freedom is possible. The first form is that through which an agent is able to deliberate and to calculate rationally what is to his/her advantage and to act in consequence to this calculation. The power that leads to action is, under this conception, the power of the appetite, which will have been the strongest in the deliberating process. It is notable that this animal freedom does not mobilise a purely impulsive force, but rather a first level of intelligence since it stems from an assessment of consequences. This version of practical rationality corresponds rather well to that attributed to the Yahoos by Swift in *Gulliver's Travels*. The existence of an intrapsychical conflict between contradicting desires and the capacity of an agent to solve this conflict by deliberation, that involves a discursive reason, is

⁴ MSS 4980 f. 8, quoted by Thévenet A., 2007, p. 123.

enough to define a practical rationality that Cudworth calls animal. But this rationality does not go along with an awareness of values, which involves more. Cudworth's reasoning is purely dialectic: he supposes that animals are endowed with reason, on top of their instinctive or passionate determinations. This hypothesis enables us to determine what these beings lack in order to achieve morality: another capacity of elevation.

Two capacities of elevation should be distinguished. The soul can rise above passions in two ways, either by mobilising the "inferior reason" or the "superior reason". Inferior reason is an exercise of rationality orientated towards the maximisation of advantage. Superior reason is a use of rationality orientated towards moral good – this is the reason why Cudworth identifies "superior reason", "instinct of honesty", and "boniform principle"⁵. In the middle power of the soul lies the hegemonic, the ruling faculty that can extend either towards superior reason or towards inferior reason.

With regard to the fact that the hegemonic is concerned in both the higher and the lower principle, Cudworth has this explanation: "for freewilled beings are essentially neither one nor other". This means that it is not part of the essence of a being endowed with freewill to exercise the inferior reason, nor even the superior reason, in that this exercise would be a function they would accomplish spontaneously and immediately because of their nature. Some beings are endowed with freewill because the exercise of superior reason, and even of the inferior one, involves a tension in them, a dynamic identification of the hegemonic part to one of these two principles. "Essentially" here must be opposed to "by taking part". For X to be A though not essentially A, X must not be by itself A but only by taking part in something else. Thus can Cudworth say that divine life is not essential to human souls – which amounts to saying that human souls can take part in divine life, but at the cost of an aggregate of efforts that Cudworth designates under the term "capability"⁶. This interpretation is confirmed by a passage in another manuscript:

The autexousion power or freewill is a power in such beings as are not essentially good but yet capable of being unspottedly pure and holy and having a participation of the nature of goodness [...]. (MSS 4982 f. 20, quoted by Thévenet A., 2007, p. 516)

To summarise: a first way of rising above passions and appetites, of taking control of them by exerting an action over them – which is indeed some sort of exercise, albeit "inferior", of power over oneself – appears when one has recourse to inferior rationality only, that is to say when one uses only the consideration of the maximisation of advantage against

⁵ MSS 4981 ff. 100-101, quoted by Thévenet A., 2007, p. 130.

⁶ Add. Man. 4981 f. 6, quoted by Thévenet A., 2007, p. 132.

the passions and appetites. Thus, for instance, the fear of being punished, can incite me to resist the temptation of cheating. Here, to say “cheating is wrong” means disapproving of cheating indeed, but this disapproval is not strictly moral because it simply means that it is dangerous for me to cheat. Another way of rising above the emotional or conative determinations consists in taking control over them by drawing one’s inspiration from the consideration of moral good or “divine life”.

Cudworth does not deny that the Hobbesian concept of deliberation might be rudimentarily the concept of a power over oneself and consequently a certain freedom. He accepts that Hobbes’s theory might be the theory of a type of rationality, the one that he calls “sagacity” or “wit” (the word is borrowed from Hobbes)⁷. Cudworth’s argument against Hobbes consists in showing that this conception of rationality is not enough to account for our capacity to be moral. A superior form of power over oneself and of freedom must be introduced.

What are the relations between moral freewill and the position of contingency in the world? As Anne Thévenet writes,

Contingency is not situated in the capacity of the soul to choose between good and evil: the soul cannot desire evil. On the other hand, it cannot make the necessary efforts to identify good from honesty and subscribe to it. [...] Moral freewill can choose moral good if the soul exercises its power correctly; but it can also fail”. (Thévenet A., 2007, p. 133)

Contingency “is situated in this variability of the intensity of efforts produced by a soul to exercise its power over itself” (Thévenet A., 2007, p. 479). To be free to act, it is indeed necessary, according to Cudworth, to be, first of all, free to will – and to be free to will, being the author of the action that consists in willing is not enough, it is also necessary to have the possibility, so to speak, to will not to will. But this characterisation of freedom that makes the contingency a condition (as an alternative possibility), does not apply to the ordinary exercise of will as conceived in the linear model of deliberation, as if willing was only one occurrence in a chain of mental events. What Cudworth has in mind here is rather a much deeper exercise of the will, an ascetic, gymnastic one, by which the hegemonic part works to identify itself to the superior reason.

⁷ Add. Man. 4981 ff. 100-101, quoted by Thévenet A., 2007, p. 130.

Power over oneself is “a power [of the soul] over the passive capability of its own nature, its power of actuating its own possibility”⁸. The passive capability of the soul is the aggregate of its potentialities. It refers to the fact that the soul is likely to listen to in such and such a circumstance the voice of such and such a desire. Freewill is the capacity, this time active and voluntary, to implement a transformation of the passive and involuntary capability. Thus, the soul can choose not so much as to not listen to the voice of desire in such and such a circumstance but rather to train to not to listen. The development of the power over oneself is achieved through the culture of dispositions. This dispositional conception greatly transforms the question of freewill.

Let us clarify this point by positioning two contradictory theses with two different models of deliberation. Cudworth supports thesis (1) and subscribes to model (4) whereas Hobbes supports thesis (2) and subscribes to model (3).

(1) Thesis of freewill: for an agent to be free, it must be in his/her power to decide or not to act, and not only to act or not; and that power to decide or not is available to him/her.

(2) Thesis of serf-will: for an agent to be free, for it to depend on him/her to act or not is enough, and this does not involve that he/she should have the power to decide or not to act – power he/she does not possess anyway.

(3) Causal linear model of deliberation (“inferior reason”): a deliberation is a succession of psychological states of different types, emotional, conative, cognitive, that, under normal circumstances, lead to a decision to act that is directly caused by the occurrence of the last state. The last state can be defined as the strongest, in a way that is not simply mechanical. “Will” is the name that can be given to the last state. The action that comes from it is voluntary, but neither the decision nor the deliberation that precede it actually are.

(4) Dispositional model of deliberation (“superior reason”): a deliberation is, at the first level, a succession of psychological states as described above (a first level hesitation between conflicting tendencies), but, at a superior level it is a process whereby practical dispositions form. They can be bad habits, when the decision to act is abandoned to the succession of psychological states; they are of a moral nature when the decision to act is made according to the consideration of moral good. A second level hesitation constitutes the heart of deliberation: it involves the type of practical dispositions that the agent tries, or not, to develop. This is the reason why the will is at play throughout the whole of the deliberative process, not only at the final stage of the triggering of the action.

⁸ MSS 4980 f. 51, quoted by Thévenet A., 2007, p. 475.

When the discussion over the two theses is carried out in a theoretical framework that is dominated by the causal linear model, the thesis of the serf-will presents very strong arguments, for there exists a sort of affinity between this thesis and model (3). With Cudworth, when the dispositional model (4) is introduced, the thesis of freewill changes dimension and meaning, and cannot be so easily discarded.

A more thorough work would involve examining Bramhall's arguments against Hobbes, so as to determine whether they would not be more conclusive if the causal linear model were completely abandoned by Bramhall. An ambiguous thesis can be found in the latter's work. It is difficult to say whether it falls within the causal linear model or the dispositional one:

For the manner how the understanding doth determine the will, it is not naturally but morally. The will is moved by the understanding, not as by an efficient having a causal influence into the effect, but only by proposing and representing the object. And therefore, as it were ridiculous to say that the object of the sight is the cause of seeing, so it is to say that the proposing of the object by the understanding to the will is the cause of willing; and therefore the understanding hath no place in that concurrence of causes, which according to T.H. do necessitate the will. (Bramhall, in Hobbes, 1839-45, V, No. vii, p. 73)

This passage must be compared to a very similar argument in Cudworth's *Treatise of Freewill*, although the latter unambiguously falls within the dispositional model:

Again in that contest betwixt the dictate of honesty or of conscience, and the suggestion of the lower appetites urging and impelling to pleasure or present good or profit, I say in this contest there is no necessary understanding interposing and coming in to umpire between, that does unavoidably and irresistibly determine one way or other. But the matter wholly depends upon the soul's hegemonic or power over itself, its exerting itself with more or less force or vigour in resisting these lower affections, or hindering the gratification of them, according to which the issue or event of action will be determined. (Cudworth, 1838, p. 42)

The difference between Bramhall and Cudworth is that the latter expressly defends a dispositional theory of freedom: the free act does not involve a free and previous volition but rather a disposition that has voluntarily been installed so that the act sets itself the good as a target.

Critic of "vulgarly received psychology"

In order to specify what distances Cudworth from Bramhall, it is necessary to highlight an argument of the *Treatise* that, sometimes, tends to send Hobbes and Bramhall back to back, even if the object as a whole is to defend the latter against the former. Cudworth tries to answer the following question: how to account for the interior conflict we experience between

will (free, superior, aimed at the good, that allows us to govern ourselves) and the appetites or desires (aimed at utility or pleasure)? Hobbes rejected this distinction between a pure will and desire or appetite; he called *will* the appetite that has the last word. It is because it is last that it is said to be will – a desire that involves an action –, not because it is free. The psychology of faculties accounts for the interior conflict by distinguishing between the will and the understanding. Cudworth distinguishes two forms of this “vulgarly received psychology” (Cudworth, 1838, p. 20):

- Hobbes’s psychology, for whom the will is only an intrinsically blind desire, possibly enlightened and determined by a calculation. The will, thus envisaged, is necessitated.

- Other authors’ psychology (which must not only include Descartes – as Cudworth caricatures him – but also, I believe, Bramhall) for whom the understanding advises the will, presents it with objects and leaves it free to follow, or not, its opinion. The will, thus envisaged, is free.

Cudworth is as opposed to this second conception as he is to the first. It avoids the pitfall of necessitarianism by assimilating necessity to whim. Necessity has been replaced by chance and the arbitrary.

But if the blind will does not only at first fortuitously determine the understanding both to exercise and object, but also after all is done remains indifferent to follow the last dictate of it or not, and doth fortuitously determine itself either in compliance with the same or otherwise, then will liberty of will be mere irrationality, and madness itself acting or determining all human actions. (Cudworth, 1838, p. 23)

This mistake derives from the fake distinction between will and understanding and from the recourse to the faculties and interior stage that accompanies the psychology of faculties. Faculties are turned into sorts of people in the soul (Cudworth, 1838, p. 24-5). The understanding suggests to the will, provides it with a representation; the will listens to the understanding, obeys or disobeys it.

All this while it is really the man or the soul that understands, and the man or the soul that wills, as it is the man that walks and the man that speaks or talks, and the musician that plays a lesson or the lute. So that it is one and the same subsistent thing, one and the same soul that both understandeth and willeth, and the same agent only that acteth diversely. And thus may it well be conceived that one and the same reasonable soul in us both will understandingly or knowingly of what it wills; and understand or think of this or that object willingly. (Cudworth, 1838, p. 25-6)

Cudworth rejects the psychology of faculties because it leads to presenting a blind will, whereas the will is intelligent, and a powerless understanding, whereas the understanding is

active. Blind, the will is arbitrary; or else it is necessitated by the command of the understanding. Cudworth looks for a third way, that of a free and intelligent will, capable of determining itself: neither an extrinsic determination nor an indetermination, but a self-determination, to use his own words.

Philosophers often reject the psychology of faculties to criticise the idea of freewill, saying that what is free is the agent, not the will which, as a faculty, is a fiction and cannot be regarded as a real subject. Yet, Cudworth plays the freedom of the agent not against the freedom of the will, but against the necessitarian conception or the “irrational” conception of the will. He reminds the reader that it is human beings who will or who understand, not to say that the will is only a philosopher’s fiction, but rather to suggest that there is a deep unity between intellection and volition. This unity is typical of ancient philosophy: the volition of the Stoics is a tension of the intelligence that examines representations; Plato’s love and Aristotle’s desire are orientated towards a good that they anticipate and, in a sense, perceive. Conversely, the psychology of faculties marks an opposition between volition and intellection that characterises a great part of modern philosophy and leads it towards a necessitarianism or a libertarianism that did not exist under the same form with the Ancients.

Cudworth criticises the psychology of faculties in order to stress that the will is driven by the good, understood as a primary, superior and determining object (Cudworth, 1838, p. 29-30). He thus opposes himself to the donjuanism of modern philosophy, that is to say to the primacy accorded to desire, to the thesis of its indifference as regards objects, of its insatiability because it is fundamentally self-desire, desire to survive as desire. Thomas Shadwell had noted the deep connivance between Hobbism and donjuanism, to the point of putting this “devilish philosophy” into his Don John’s mouth:

Can that blind faculty, the Will, be free,
 When it depends upon the Understanding?
 Which argues first, before the Will can chuse;
 And the last dictates of the judgement sways
 The Will; as in a balance, the last weight
 Put in the scale, lifts up the other end,
 And with the same necessity. » (Shadwell, 1676, p. 26-27)

Pieces of the conversation between Hobbes and Bramhall can here be recognised.

The theological consequences are considerable. If all will is intelligently orientated towards a good, so is it true for the will of God. It cannot be conceived like a simple

almightiness, but is ruled by wisdom and goodness⁹. The rejection of the psychology of faculties which divides the soul and artificially separates volition from intellection results in the rejection of the theology of almightiness. Divine will is orientated towards a good; therefore moral norms are not the effects of an arbitrary will, but are what orientate and enlighten all will, even God's (Cudworth, 1838, p. 49-50). It is in this sense that there is a reality of moral norms. Just as there is a conceptual link between theological voluntarism and moral nominalism – moral distinctions are conventions because they are the effect of a will –, there is a link between the rejection of voluntarism and moral realism.]

A deliberation at the second degree

Let us come back to the comparison between the two models of deliberation. According to Cudworth, we are indeed free to will. If we apply to willing the three conditions of freedom that have been presented, we can say that agent X freely willed₁ to do this or that if and only if (a) X is the author of the action that consists in willing₁, in the sense that he willed₁ to do it because he willed₂ to will₁ to do it; (b) X could have not willed₁ to do it; and (c) the choice between to will₁ and not to will₁ is between things with unequal moral value. This thesis of freewill, according to the proposed interpretation, is valid in the case of the dispositional model, *i.e.* it applies to the installation of the dispositions and not to the occurrence of the volitions in the “train” of psychological states as the causal linear model describes it.

According to the dispositional model, the soul is capable of a choice which, if it is indeed of a practical nature, is not of the same level as the choice it is driven to according to the causal linear model. Indeed, in the dispositional model, the choice the soul is driven to according to the causal linear model constitutes an option which it may or may not choose, depending on whether it partakes rather of the inferior reason or rather of the superior reason. In other words, choice as conceived in the dispositional model is a decision on the way to decide in the causal linear model sense. If choice in the causal linear model sense can be qualified as “bouletic”, it may be said metabouletic according to the dispositional model, because it is at the root of the mode of deliberation. Cudworth's defence of freewill does not consist in trying to withdraw the bouletic level from the realm of necessity – this was, I believe, what Bramhall attempted to do – but in placing freedom on the metabouletic level.

Without getting involved into the consideration of the type of answer Hobbes might give Cudworth, we owe it to the truth to note that Hobbes also considered a metabouletic

⁹ On the connections between freedom and divine love in Cudworth, see Armour L., 2008.

level in his theory of contract. And indeed, David Gauthier, Jean Hampton and Gregory Kavka clearly demonstrated it in the middle of the 1980s, contract can be conceived as a process of shift from an inferior rationality, the aim of which is individual maximisation at all cost, to a superior rationality, the aim of which is maximisation at the cost of some individual concessions that make a superior collective benefit possible. It cannot be said that Hobbes had ruled out the idea that the deliberation mode of the causal linear model could be improved. Simply, Hobbes conceived this improvement not as an interior “elevation”, the way Cudworth meant it, but as the discovery of collective deliberation under the form of cooperation.

All in all, Cudworth conceives the exercise of moral freewill as a moment in an improvement that involves, at the same time, the character and rationality of the agent. To be free means to choose to pass from an inferior rationality to a superior rationality – this passage involves the development of specific dispositions. The soul’s action over oneself is, for this reason, difficult and the choice of change of rationality is not an arbitrary decree, but is obtained after much striving:

The lower principle prevails upon us by its own activity but nature doth but show us as it were a glimpse of ye higher good inviting us and beckoning to us [...] to put forth our own self active conation towards [it].¹⁰

We might, in fact, try to make to Cudworth the objection that Hobbes once made to Bramhall: if the will is neither arbitrary nor whimsical, but orientated on a good, then one falls back into the necessity of the will, even if it is a rational necessity instead of simply a causal one, in the sense of the efficient cause. “It is reasonable to think that all elections and volitions are determined by the reasons of good, and by the appearance of the greater good” (Cudworth, 1838, p. 73). Cudworth answers that this determination is not necessitating, that it does not detract from freedom in any way, because the recognition of the reasons for the good involves a fight against the inferior desires, according to the dispositional conception.

The Plotinian source

The inspiration for this dispositional theory of deliberation is found in Plotinus. In the treatise *On Free Will and the Will of the One*, Plotinus makes a short presentation of moral psychology that enlightens us to what human freedom is. The aim of Plotinus’s presentation is to enable us to determine if what we say about human freedom can be transferred to divine freedom. If this preliminary presentation is stripped of the theology which it introduces, there

¹⁰ MSS 4980 f. 75, quoted by Thévenet A., 2007, p. 481.

remains, at hand, a sort of condensed Plotinian anthropology that enables us to understand the control of passions, what moral freedom is, i.e. the relation between the will and the good that it must set itself on, and which powers are appealed to in the development of this freedom. Several theses are presented by Plotinus, in an elliptical discussion on the Aristotelian and stoic conceptions of the voluntary and involuntary, in particular the thesis of the necessity of a strong distinction between simple spontaneity, on the one hand, and the control over an action on the other – whereby the action depends on us – and the even superior degree that constitutes “self-determination”, αὐτεχούδιον. In simple spontaneity, we follow our emotional determinations. In control, we fight them. In self-determination, we are free from them. The difference between control and full freedom is, on the one hand, the difference between the power of the soul over itself when it is torn between conflicting determinations – what a Modern would call the fight between reason and the passions for the control of the will – and, on the other, the power of the intellectualised soul, when virtue is formed and the knowledge of good is at the root of the action. Power over oneself which is the freedom from external action has its own principle in a freedom that consists of an internal energy, an intellection and a contemplation.

So that also in practical actions self-determination [αὐτεχούσιον] and being in our own power [τὸ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν] is not referred to practice and outward activity but to the inner activity of virtue itself, that is, its thought and contemplation. But one must say that this virtue is a kind of intellect and not count in with it the passions which are enslaved and limited by the reason; for these, Plato says, “come close to the body, since it is by habits and exercises” that they are set in order. (Plotinus, 1988, VI, 8 (39), vi, 19-26)

Here, Plotinus alludes to two passages from Plato’s *Republic*, first from Book IV, (443c-d) where external and internal activities are distinguished, then from Book VII:

Then the other so-called virtues of the soul do seem akin to those of the body. For it is true that where they do not pre-exist, they are afterwards created by habit and practice. But the excellence of thought, it seems, is certainly of a more divine quality... (Plato, 1969, 518 d-e)

For Plotinus, the concern for the control of the passions (τὸ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν) is clearly stoic. He, therefore, at the beginning of his *Treatise 39*, goes beyond Stoicism in Platonism, since his major thesis is that for something to be within our power, our soul needs to have previously intellectualised itself through the knowledge of good, which conditions the governing of human actions. With Plato and against the Stoics, Plotinus demonstrates that the source of action is in contemplation. At the first degree of spontaneity, the soul is simply led by the affects. At the superior degree which consists in acting by oneself, the soul manages to

overcome emotional determinations by submitting them to reason so that the act depends ultimately on reason. But this control is really only achieved under the condition of an even higher level of freedom, for the soul only has its freedom through the intellect: “The soul, then, becomes free when it presses on without hindrance to the Good by means of Intellect, and what it does through this is in its power; but Intellect is free through itself” (Plotinus, 1988, VI, 8 (39), 7, 1-4).

In short, virtue is the choice of good; but there is also a more fundamental choice yet, the choice of virtue, that is the choice that leads to preferring virtue. It is in this sense that Plato writes in book X of the *Republic* – this is the myth of Er – that “virtue has no master over her, and each shall have more or less of her as he honors her or does her despite” (Plato, 1969, 617e). Plotinus quotes Plato’s formula in order to describe the will of the virtue which is at the root of virtuous will:

And what about virtue itself which is according to state and disposition? Are we to say that when the soul is in a bad way it comes to set it to rights by bringing the passions and desires within proper limits? In what way then are we saying that being good is in our power and “virtue has no master”? Yes, it is if we wish and choose it; or because when virtue comes to be in us it constructs freedom and being in our own power and does not allow us to be any more slaves of what we were enslaved to before. (Plotinus, 1988, VI, 8 (39), 5, 27-34)

This choice of the virtue or, one could say, since virtue is the choice of good, this choice of the choice of good, opens up a determination of the soul that is of a particular nature, for it is a disposition, ἔχτις or διάθεσις. Once a lasting disposition to follow good is installed in the soul thanks to the intellection and contemplation of good, the soul has set itself beyond the fight between reason and the passions and can enjoy its achieved freedom. If the lowest degree is put to one side, that of simple spontaneity, the voluntary is situated at two levels, that of the decision to act and that of the setting of the primary disposition that enables us to decide to act with a view to achieving good. The freedom to decide to act is rooted elsewhere than in (exterior) action:

If then virtue is a kind of other intellect, a state which in a way intellectualises the soul, again, being in our power [τὸ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν] does not belong to the realm of action but in intellect at rest from actions. (Plotinus, 1988, VI, 8 (39), 5, 34-37)

Thus, Plato’s moral psychology cannot be reduced to the winged chariot (in *Phaedrus*), which though it describes the intermediary moment of the struggle between reason and the passions – the coach driver must work hard to drive his two-horse carriage given one is docile and the other rebellious –, says nothing of the science that gives the coach driver such

authority. It is not in the exterior act of driving the carriage that the driver establishes this authority. His movements and the discipline he imposes onto his horses supposes that the soul has already turned, through the intellect, to good.

The image of the winged chariot, without doubt badly understood, leads to a partial understanding of the conditions of the mastering of the passions. In a book he dedicated to defending a naturalist conception of ethics, in the wake of David Hume, Simon Blackburn presented the famous Humean thesis according to which “reason is, and ought only to be, the slave of the passions” as a simple reversal of the Platonist image of the control of the undisciplined harnessing by the rational driver or ‘Kantian captain’ (Blackburn S., 1998, p. 239). The reversal consists in saying that such a conflict between reason and the passions could not exist, for reason alone is not a source of motivation nor of evaluation. Blackburn also uses another Platonist image, that of the ship in book VI of the *Republic*:

Conceive this sort of thing happening either on many ships or on one: Picture a shipmaster in height and strength surpassing all others on the ship, but who is slightly deaf and of similarly impaired vision, and whose knowledge of navigation is on a par with his sight and hearing. Conceive the sailors to be wrangling with one another for control of the helm, each claiming that it is his right to steer though he has never learned the art and cannot point out his teacher or any time when he studied it. [...] They take command of the ship, consume its stores and, drinking and feasting, make such a voyage of it as is to be expected from such... (Plato, 1969, 488 a-c)

According to Blackburn, all that is needed is to vary the Platonist ship to account for the conception of deliberation that can be found in David Hume: the piloting of the ship entirely depends on the composition of the crew – if by “crew” what is meant is that neither the captain nor the owner of the boat are included. Humeans believe that having resort to the captain is superfluous: the passions adjust themselves and do not need to be controlled. Blackburn presents Hume’s philosophy as a reversal of an erroneous, Platonising conception of deliberation, whereas his interpretation of the winged chariot makes a manifestly absurd psychological model of it, since it presents the authority of reason as the condition of discipline without mentioning that it is its result. It seems to me that what Blackburn calls the fundamental mistake about deliberation is not Plato’s mistake, at least if Plotinus’s or Cudworth’s reading of Plato is adopted.

Indeed, if Plotinus be believed, the Platonist conception of practical deliberation does not exhaust itself with the question of the taming of rebellious or unruly emotional strengths. The true question is not about the means of the control of the passions by reason, but rather

that of the source of the authority that reason can acquire over the passions. This authority can be found in a knowledge of good together with the development of the dispositions that reinforce this knowledge. It is a point on which Cudworth's debt to Plotinus is truly obvious. This source reinforces the thesis according to which the dispositional theory presented in the *Treatise of Freewill* is indeed different from the stoic conceptions of self-control.

Conclusion: Plotinise at the Cartesian time

It is now possible to show how Cudworth holds together an ascetic inspired by Plotinus with an intervention into the modern controversy over the status of the will. Several commentators have insisted on Cudworth's anti-Cartesianism, especially because of the severe critique of theological voluntarism. They have well seen that such a critique is unfair to Descartes, for it is not sufficiently informed of its object, but they have not questioned the distance between the two authors. And yet, on two points, at least, Cudworth's and Descartes's theses are closely akin.

(1) Cudworth insists on the personal responsibility of the agent in the use of his faculties, in opposition to any explanation that would endow these faculties with a causal role to the detriment of this responsibility. Yet, in the *Fourth Meditation*, it is obvious that it is neither the will, nor the understanding, nor even their disproportion which is (to speak properly) responsible for the mistake. It is I in so far as I use my faculties badly, faculties which, in their disproportion, are conditions and not causes of the mistake. From this point of view, one must not be fooled by the anti-Cartesian show that Cudworth frequently indulges in: he uses the lexicon of faculties, with indeed more care than Descartes, but what matters to him, as to Descartes, is the responsibility of the agent.

(2) Although Descartes was careful not to put the question of freedom on the theological ground¹¹, when he does move on to this ground, his position and Cudworth's are quite comparable: "L'homme pouvant n'avoir pas toujours une parfaite attention aux choses qu'il doit faire, c'est une bonne action que de l'avoir, et de faire, par son moyen, que notre volonté suive si fort la lumière de l'entendement, qu'elle ne soit point du tout indifférente¹²." Cudworth does not say otherwise: "Necessity or non-contingency of good caused by an active and vigorous self-active determination of the soule to good is the fullest and most perfect

¹¹ See Descartes, letter to Mesland, 2 May 1644: "Rien ne m'a empêché de parler de la liberté que nous avons à suivre le bien ou le mal, sinon que j'ai voulu éviter, autant que j'ai pu, les controverses de la théologie, et me tenir dans les bornes de la philosophie naturelle."

¹² *Ibid.*

degree of liberty.”¹³ There are degrees of freedom, and its best use is not in indifference under whatever of its forms.

A difference seems to remain, amongst others without doubt important, between Cudworth and Descartes with regard to the means by which it is possible to make the use of freedom good: Cudworth talks about disposition where Descartes talks about attention. Both agree that it is not enough to be endowed with freewill, something must be made of it through an action that each is responsible for. But what is to be done is thought by Descartes to be related to attention and accuracy, in accordance with a philosophy of judgement, whereas Cudworth relates it, via the recourse to practical dispositions, to the Ancients’ dietetics. But even this difference must be qualified, since attention, as viewed by Descartes, supposes, in its own way, the development of dispositions, as the letter to Elizabeth dated on 15 September 1645 reminds us:

Il ne peut, ce me semble, y avoir que deux choses qui soient requises pour être disposé à bien juger: l’une est la connaissance de la vérité, et l’autre l’habitude qui fait qu’on se souvient et qu’on acquiesce à cette connaissance, toutes les fois que l’occasion le requiert.

[...] En ce sens on a raison, dans l’École, de dire que les vertus sont des habitudes.

Borrowing from Plotinus to answer Hobbes better than Bramhall did, and to defend, better than Descartes, the thesis of freewill, Cudworth rests his epistemology and his ethics on a theory of intellectual virtues, the antique way. Not only is it not incompatible with the Cartesian conception, but even seems necessary to it.

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