FREEDOM OF CHOICE

Human beings are capable of the following behavior that has not been observed in animals. We ask ourselves "What should my goal in life be - if anything?" "Is there anything I should live for?" "What should *I* place my hopes and expectations for happiness in: money, pleasure, God, etc.?" Such behavior requires us to make use of abstract universal ideas such as *goal*, *end*, *object of desire*, *source of happiness*, etc. That fact – that this kind of behavior requires us to use such abstract and universal ideas – is what I want to focus on. Asking, "What should my goal in life be?" requires us to use the concept of goal or end in an abstract way. That is, we are not here using the concept to recognize that a particular concrete thing is an example in fact of what we mean by "end" or "goal" as we use our concept "man" concretely when we recognize that an object is in fact a man and not a dummy or statue or gorilla. If we could identify a particular state of existence as being the end of our lives, we wouldn't be asking the question "What should be the end to which my life is directed?" Hence in asking that question, our concept of end relates us to the abstract object "goal or purpose of life" directly, as something considered in itself and not as a property embodied in some concrete state of affairs. When we reach the end of our deliberation it is another matter. We may say "I will live my life for money," or, "I will live my life for fame," or, "I will live my life for God." Then we are viewing a particular thing or state of affairs as embodying this idea.

The same is true of the concept of "placing my hopes in" or "placing one's happiness in." People place their expectations for happiness in different things: in becoming President of the United States, in helping their fellow man, in professional success, In good marital relationships, etc. The concept of happiness is an abstract concept, which is able to refer to any of these things in a given case. In itself "Happiness" means the fullest possible satisfaction of all my desires.

And it is important to not that these concepts are not only capable of being used in an abstract way, that is, apart from reference to concrete things and states of affairs. They are also universal concepts. The concept of goal is capable of referring to many things. The concept of happiness means the fullest possible satisfaction of all my desires. (A universal concept is a concept that can be used to refer to more than one individual.)

Free choice is basically a matter of making the decisions we are talking about concerning what our goals in life will be or where to place our hopes for happiness. I claim we have the ability to make such decisions and, for the sake of brevity, I will refer to our disposition to behave in this way as the "will." This can be taken as a definition of "will," which simply refers to the fact that we are able to make decisions about where to place our hopes for happiness. Another definition shall appear below and I shall try to argue that the two definitions are equivalent. That is important.

The decisions in question are caused events, for there are no uncaused events. Therefore "will" refers to our ability to cause these events. But are not caused events determined events? Are not causes determined to produce certain events and not others? Hens lay eggs; they do not manufacture atom bombs. Why do hens cause one kind of effect and not another? They cause what they cause because of the way they themselves are built. Since hens are the kind of things they are, they produce eggs and not bombs. Since hens are built one way and not another, it is necessary that they produce one kind of effect and not another. That the effect is the kind of thing it is, is determined by the kind of thing its cause or causes are. If the effects are determined and necessitated by their causes; and if decisions are caused events, how can decisions be free? How can they be undetermined and not necessitated by their causes?

In order for us to produce decisions, we must possess a determined, causal structure, which enables us to produce them. No determined causal structure would imply no causality whatsoever. For the nature of any cause is what explains its ability to produce the effects that it does. Hence, our ability to make decisions about the goal or goals of our lives implies the presence in us of a determined, causal structure explaining our ability to make these decisions. In other words, the will is such a determined causal structure. If the will is determined, in what sense can its operation be free?

The will is determined to seek an end: it is not free to avoid seeking an end. (Actually it is not the will that seeks an end or makes a decision. It is we who seek ends and make decisions, but the will is that disposition by means of which we do these things. Thus we make decisions by means of our wills, just as we see by means of our eyes or we digest food by means of our digestive system.) So we are determined to seek ends by means of our wills; and we are not free to avoid seeking ends, because of our nature, as having the ability to will. But we are determined to seek ends only insofar as we relate to ends, by means of the abstract idea of end. We are not determined by concrete things that might embody the idea of end. We are necessitated by the search for a goal or purpose in life, insofar as we have the abstract and universal idea of goal or purpose. Nothing necessitates us to choose any particular concrete thing as the goal or purpose of our lives. We necessarily seek happiness to the extent that we grasp happiness by means of this vague and general idea, but we are not so structured that we automatically chose one specific kind of happiness over another.

In other words, we are free (here) because we are necessitated (there). Our ability to make decisions has a determined structure. But, the nature of that structure involves freedom (of one kind), because it involves necessity (of another kind.) Precisely because we are necessitated, from one point of view, we are free, from another point of view. The necessity correlates with our ability to use the concept of end, goal, happiness, etc. in the abstract way that we illustrated on the first page. Since the necessity implied by the causal structure of the will is correlated, with that ability to use these concepts in the abstract way, it is not correlated with the concrete use of these concepts. The will is so structured that it will necessarily chose a goal, it is not so structured that it will decide necessarily that my goal will be money, or power, or love of neighbor, or love of God, etc.

For the moment, I want to focus on the decision to place my happiness in some concrete object, say, the security that comes from wealth. Let us say I decide that the maximum satisfaction of my desires will come from a life in which I place the pursuit of money above all other pursuits. Such a decision will rarely if ever be made explicitly and in full consciousness. The person who is doing this may not even admit it to himself. In fact, he probably won' t admit it to himself under normal circumstances. Such admissions often come only after some disaster. The hard driving businessman wakes up one day to find his marriage in shambles. Then he realizes that all those years what he has really been doing is placing success above personal relationships, putting happiness in money, or making success the end of his life. He is right. That IS what he has been doing all those years! But he was not fully aware that he was doing it! So the descriptions of behavior that have been given here in terms of making abstract use of ideas, and the description of the function of the will, as correlated without ability to think abstractly, are not meant to imply that we conduct our lives by walking around contemplating abstract objects. The opposite is meant. What is meant is that relating to abstract objects is something implicit in other things we do, and that this implicit relation to abstract objects is so very natural to us that we do it almost

unconsciously, so natural us that we do not need to stop and consciously reflect on what we are doing in order to do it. So those descriptions were not intended to refer to things that you are obviously aware of doing all the time.

Still, as the example of our businessman shows, there are times when we are forced to reflect on these things consciously. And no matter how frequent or infrequent they might be, they are crucially important when they occur. Perhaps their infrequent occurrence is in direct proportion to their importance. If only something as important as a disaster can cause us to reflect in this way, then it is fortunate if we don't consciously reflect in this way very often. On the other hand, maybe the opposite is true. Maybe we should pause and ask ourselves about what things we are putting our happiness in more often. Maybe the businessman would have saved his marriage had he found out sooner what he was really making the end of his life.

What I am concerned about here is that no matter how infrequent infrequently we consciously reflect on where we have been directing our lives, we do it sometimes. And when we do we can recognize that we can accurately describe ourselves as chasing something as our goal, or placing our happiness in some specific thing. These descriptions are accurate whether or not we are consciously aware of making use of the abstract ideas of purpose and happiness. Yet these ideas were involved in what we were doing.

The decision to make money our goal can be described in two ways. We can say that we make money the end of our life, or we can say that we make money the means to our happiness. These expressions appear to be contradictory. One says that we make money an end; the other says that we make money a means. Are not ends and means the opposites of one another? In reality, the contradiction is only apparent. We necessarily desire a goal, but only insofar as we have a universal idea of goal. When we make a free decision about a goal, we are desiring a goal in the concrete order. So the thing or state of affairs we have chosen deserves to be called our end. This is the specific end that we are striving for. But in relation to happiness or purpose-in-life, considered in the abstract, the same specific state of affairs can be considered a means. I desire happiness, considered in the abstract, and the concrete course of action I am deciding on will be my means for achieving that end. In adopting a style of life, I am in effect saying, "Whatever happiness (abstract idea) I achieve will be that happiness (concretely considered) that comes out of this specific way of living. At one and the same time I make a specific course of action, or mode of living, both an end and a means. I decide that a particular kind of thing will be a means to the happiness that I necessarily desire because of my universal concept of happiness, and in doing so I decide that the concrete results of this particular course of action will be the end that I actually achieve in the concrete. I freely decide my end in the concrete by freely deciding the course of action that will function as a means to my end (considered in the abstract.) The means will yield a particular result and that result will constitute whatever happiness I achieve in the actual world.

For example, I can decide to seek happiness (in part) through marriage, celibacy, or extra-marital relations. I necessarily desire happiness and these are the concrete means that are open to me; I will choose one or the other. In choosing one of these means I determine (in part) the kind of happiness that I will ultimately achieve in my actual life. I determine (in part) to what extent my desires will actually be fulfilled. If I choose marriage as a means to happiness, I may or may or may not succeed. That is uncertain. What is certain is that if I choose marriage as a means to happiness, I am excluded from the kind of result that celibacy would have yielded. As means to ends these two

styles of life differ; they produce different results, and they may not produce their results automatically. We can fail to achieve happiness through the means we choose, so it can be a gamble. But still, one way of living will not produce the results another way will. So, by choosing one way of living, as we must, we are limiting the possible results we will actually achieve to a certain kind, and excluding other possible results. It is true to say that in choosing marriage, for example, as my means for achieving the end that I necessarily desire, happiness as grasped by an abstract idea, I specify my end in the concrete.

I claim that the outline presented here represents the only way to counter the arguments against freedom of choice. If there were not some determined causal structure in the will, there would be no causality in the will. So, the will must be structured so as to necessarily seek some object, or some objects. But if the object necessarily sought by the will were some thing concrete and specific, there would be no freedom, either. For we would necessarily choose the means which appeared to us to satisfy this concrete desire more fully. Thus a dog presumably desires food necessarily. And, given a choice between two ways of satisfying this appetite, the dog will presumably choose the food that appears to him to be more desirable, that appears to fulfill his desires more completely. That he has desires and that he perceives some things as more desirable than others are not matters of free choice on his part.

On the other hand, if we are to be granted freedom of choice, it must be the case that nothing appears to us as necessarily fulfilling our desires more completely than the other alternatives we have to choose from, nothing necessarily brings us closer to fulfilling that which we are determined to desire, that which we are not free not to desire. Because we desire the final goal of life only by means of our abstract and universal idea, no concrete state of affairs can necessarily appear to us as bringing us closer to that goal than any other concrete state of affairs. If the happiness we necessarily desire were some definable and delimited set of things, then some course of action could appear to us to bring us closer to that happiness than others. But insofar as we desire it of necessity, happiness does not consist of some definable and delimited state of affairs.

This explains why we are able to frustrate instinctive desires while animals cannot. The desire for food has concrete, not abstract, objects. Hence some foods will appear better to us than others, just as it will to the dog; and there is nothing free about this. That I prefer steak to chicken is not a free choice on my part. I cannot bring it about that I am enjoying myself as much when I eat chicken as when I eat steak simply by deciding to enjoy myself equally in both circumstances. The dog and we are alike in this, but, from another point of view, we are not alike. I can decide to refrain from any of the foods I like; the dog cannot. We fast; the dog does not. We dominate over all our instincts with their specific objects such as food, sex, survival, etc. And our ability to dominate over all of these desires with specific objects does not in itself have any one concrete object. Different humans have different objectives in frustrating their instincts, fasting can be done for many different motives. Thus human behavior in frustrating instinctive drives gives evidence for the kind of description we have given for the will as an ability to make decisions which is not so structured as to have any determined, concrete goals. We apparently do have the causal ability to transcend instinct. And whatever causal mechanism is involved does not display any determined relation to a specific kind of object, as do our instincts. And this is precisely the way we have described our faculty of free choice.

What we have been doing on these pages is responding to the argument that caused events are determined events, or that every cause must necessitate its effects. We have been trying to show that there is a kind of cause – and only one kind of cause – that can produce its effects in an non-determined fashion. Seeing that there can be free causality depends on seeing the connection between conceptual thought and freedom of choice. It is because we are capable of grasping things by means of universal concepts and can relate to a universal object of thought considered in abstraction from any of its individual instances, that we can be the cause of our decisions without being determined to produce this decision as opposed to that decision. So we have refuted the idea that caused events are produced necessarily by their causes by tying together the idea that we can grasp universals with the idea that we are the cause of the decisions concerning our goals in life.

In the following pages the same argument will be put in different terms, but it will be important to see that these are the same arguments. Above, the will was defined as our ability to make decisions concerning our goals in life, or where to put our hopes for happiness. Here is a different definition, but one that will amount to the same thing. The will is the intellectual appetite. By "appetite" is simply meant a. power of desire, our being disposed to have something as a goal we are seeking. "Intellectual" refers to the fact that, just as we can have desires which result from our perceptual knowledge of things, we can have desires resulting from our conceptual knowledge of things. For instance, we desire to eat certain foods because we remember how those foods tasted in the past. These are desires which are the result of perceptual knowledge. But we can also desire a food because we have sufficient scientific knowledge of nutrition to know that it is good for us regardless of how it tastes. This would be a desire resulting from our intellectual knowledge.

What characterizes our intellectual, as opposed to perceptual, knowledge is the state of universality that characterizes the intellect's objects. Just as we have universal concepts, such as "man," "chair," and "apple," that transcend our understanding of individual men, chairs, and apples, so we have universal concepts such as "goodness," "desirability," "goal," and "object of desire," that extend beyond any particular object of desire with which we are acquainted. As a result of the difference between sense knowledge and intellectual knowledge, the intellect relates us to an object of desire in a different way than do the senses. The sense of sight relates us to one particular form of goodness, namely, that which is pleasing to look at. It is not because of the knowledge that comes from the sense of sight that we desire to hear pleasing sounds or experience pleasant tastes. Each of these modes of sense knowledge gives rise to a desire only for the limited mode of goodness appropriate to the knowledge of that sense. But the intellect can apprehend goodness by means of a universal idea. Our intellectual knowledge is therefore capable of giving rise to a desire for any mode of goodness whatsoever. We are capable of desiring anything we apprehend as being an instance of the idea of goodness and that idea is universal.

Through the universal idea of goodness we are capable of desiring the full range of goodness, all possible forms of desirability. This is a <u>necessary</u> consequence of the very hypothesis of there being an <u>intellectual</u> desire, for it is a necessary consequence of the nature of intellectual consciousness. And there are two other necessary consequences of our having a specifically intellectual appetite which must be mentioned. First, if it were possible for us to encounter in our experience some concrete existing thing which possessed <u>all possible goodness</u> in itself <u>we would not be free</u> not to desire that thing, and we would not be free to choose something else in preference to that thing. (An example of this situation would be the Christian doctrine of the Beatific Vision.

This is a direct experiential seeing of the nature of God as opposed to merely hearing about Him or believing in Him as we do now. God possesses all possible goodness in Himself, but since we do not experience Him as such in the concrete situations in which our decisions are made, we are free to prefer something else to Him. In the Beatific Vision, however, it would be impossible not to love God. No free will would be involved.) Our desire of this perfectly good object would be necessary, for it would follow from the very nature of the intellectual appetite as determined by the intellect 's universal idea of goodness. This object would, by hypothesis, absorb all the will's power of desire. The will desires what satisfies the intellect's idea of desirability, but this object would satisfy that idea completely. To prefer something else to this object, the will would have to find something to which the idea of goodness can refer which is not already present in this object; and that is precisely what the hypothesis rules out.

On the other hand, none of the objects of choice that actually confront us satisfies the idea of goodness completely. They are instances of desirability, individual things, or courses of action, that fall under this universal idea. But none of them exhausts the idea so as to completely absorb the will's power of desire. Since every choice that confronts us is a limited mode of goodness, acquiring something that is in some respects desirable always means losing something else that is also desirable from some point of view. Following one good course of action always means not following other courses of action that also satisfy the general notion of goodness in some respects. Deciding to spend a certain part of one's life in college implies deciding not to spend it doing other things, things which are by no means totally evil, but which have desirable aspects to them.

It follows – and this is our third consequence – that the will cannot be necessitated by anything that falls short of absolute goodness. For by the first consequence of the nature of intellectual appetite, the will is capable of desiring anything that falls under the universal idea of goodness. It is therefore capable of choosing any limited embodiment of this idea. But whenever it chooses to pursue any limited course of goodness, it excludes itself from pursuing other good things, things which it is equally capable of desiring, since they also fall under this idea. Therefore no object of limited desirability can determine the action of the will, for the will by nature must be capable of choosing whatever it is that the pursuit of any limited object would prevent us from having.

Note that this third consequence, that the will is free regarding anything short of total goodness, is a necessary consequence of the nature of the will, just as the other two consequences were. From the nature of an intellectual appetite it follows that its causing of the choice of a limited good is not determined, just as it follows that its desire of an absolutely good object, if it found such an object, would be determined. Again it is a case of freedom (here) following from necessity (there) and following with 1ogica1 necessity.

It's easy to see how this argument for choices being free, even though caused, is equivalent to our first argument. Again, we are saying that the will is necessitated only insofar as it is related to objects of desire by means of a universal idea in abstraction from all particular instances. As thus necessitated, the will's choice of any totally good thing would be a choice determined by the nature of the cause of the choice. But the choice of anything else is therefore not determined by the nature of the cause of the choice. And it is not because the will's power of desire is too small that our choices are not determined. Rather, it is because our power of desire is too great, having only

absolute goodness as its necessary object. (If we argued that choices were free because the will's power was too small to determine them, we would be saying, in effect, that choices were free

because they were to some extent uncaused events. To some extent, they would not derive from the power – deemed insufficient – of the cause that produced them.)

And when we decide on which of the limited courses of action that are available to us we will actually pursue, we are placing our happiness (at least in part) in that course of action. We are saying, "Whatever happiness I achieve in life will include the results of pursuing this course of action and not others that I could be pursuing." We are making that course of action and its results the means to that end I desire of necessity, the end I desire of necessity being the object of the abstract, universal idea, "that which satisfies desire." We can also say, "I am making a course of action and its results my end," end being understood as that which I achieve in the concrete.

Again, this analysis of free choice does not imply that in the process of making a choice we are explicitly aware of ourselves as relating to happiness, the goal of life, etc. by means of the abstract universal ideas that correspond to them. Our awareness of the presence and nature of these ideas would be implicit at best in most cases. (And we have not here even raised the question of how frequently in our lives we make genuinely free choices.) But this analysis does claim that when we reflect on our fundamental choices about the direction of our lives, we can discover the kind of ideas we have been talking about to be involved in the choices we are reflecting on. Thus, reflection revealed to our hard-driving businessman, that the concept "placing one's happiness in X" or "making X the goal of one's life" accurately describe what he was doing. In other words he now sees that he was seeking what is expressed by abstract concepts such as "ultimate meaning of life," or "complete satisfaction of desire," and at the same time sees that the concrete way in which he was pursuing these things is not identical with and not necessarily entailed by his seeking of what is expressed by these concepts. To discover at a moment of reflection that these are accurate descriptions of what he was doing before reflecting does not require him to be aware of the truth of these descriptions before reflecting. Still the truth he is discovering is what we have expressed here by saying that we have a power of desire which is not specifically determined by any concrete object, but which is determined by its relation to the objects of universal and abstract ideas, and such a power of desire is a cause that does not necessitate its effects.