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Chapter 7: Of Man's Will

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"Of Man's Will, Which Is the Thing that Laws of Action Are Made to Guide"

Chapter 7 of Book 1 in

Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity

By Richard Hooker

1594

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Chapter 7: Of man's Will, which is the thing that Laws of action are made to guide

By reason man attains to the knowledge of things that are and are not sensible. It remains therefore that we search how man attains to the knowledge of such things unsensible as are to be known that they may be done. Seeing then that nothing can move unless there be [220] some end, the desire of which provokes to motion; how should that divine power of the soul, that "spirit of our mind" (Eph. 4:23) as the apostle terms it, ever stir itself to action, unless it have also the like spur? The end for which we are moved to work, is sometimes the goodness which we conceive of the very working itself, without any further respect at all; and the cause that procures action is the mere desire of action, no other good

besides being thereby intended. Of certain turbulent minds^[1] it is said, “*Illis quieta movere magna merces videbatur*,” they thought the very disturbance of things established a hire sufficient to set them on work.^[2] Sometimes that which we do is referred to a further end, without the desire of which we would leave the same undone; as in the actions of them that gave alms to purchase thereby the praise of men.^[3]

[2.] Man in perfection of nature being made according to the likeness of his Maker resembles him also in the manner of working: so that whatever we work as men, the same we do wittingly work and freely; neither are we according to the manner of natural agents any way so tied, that it is not in our power to leave the things we do undone. The good which either is gotten by doing, or which consists in the very doing itself, causes not action, unless apprehending it as good we so like and desire it: that we do to any such end, the same we choose and prefer instead of leaving it undone^[4]. Choice there is not, unless the thing which we take be so in our power that we might have refused and left it. If fire consume the stubble, it chooses not so to do, because the nature of it is such that it can do no other. To choose is to will one thing before another. And to will is to bend our souls to the having or doing of that which they see to be good. Goodness is seen with the eye of the understanding. And the light of that eye, is reason. So that two principal fountains there are of human action, Knowledge and Will; which Will, in things tending towards any end, is termed Choice. Concerning Knowledge, “Behold, (says Moses,) I have set before you this day good and evil, life and death.” Concerning Will, he adds [221] immediately, “Choose life;” that is to say, the things that tend to life, them choose. (Deut. 30:19)

[3.] But of one thing we must have special care, as being a matter of no small moment; and that is, how the Will, properly and strictly taken, as it is of things which are referred to the end that man desires, differs greatly from that inferior natural desire which we call Appetite. The object of Appetite is whatever sensible good may be wished for; the object of Will is that good which Reason does lead us to seek. Affections, as joy, and grief, and fear, and anger, with such like, being as it were the sundry fashions and forms of Appetite, can neither rise at the thought^[5] of a thing indifferent, nor yet choose but rise at the sight of some things. Wherefore it is not altogether in our power, whether we will be stirred with affections or no: whereas actions which issue from the disposition of the Will are in the power thereof to be performed or stayed. Finally, Appetite is the Will's solicitor, and the Will is Appetite's controller; what we covet according to the one by the other we often reject; neither is any other desire termed properly Will, but that where Reason and Understanding, or the show of Reason, prescribes the thing desired.

It may be therefore a question, whether those operations of men are to be counted voluntary, in which that good which is sensible provokes Appetite, and Appetite causes action, Reason being never called to counsel; as when we eat or drink, and betake ourselves to rest, and such like. The truth is, that such actions in men having attained to the use of Reason are voluntary. For as the authority of higher powers has force even in those things, which are done without their knowledge^[6], and are of so mean reckoning that to acquaint them therewith is not necessary; in like sort, voluntarily we are said to do that also, which the Will if it wished^[7] might hinder from being done, although about the doing thereof we do not expressly use our reason or understanding, and so immediately apply our wills thereto. In cases therefore of such facility, the Will does yield her assent as it were with a kind of silence, by not dissenting; in which respect her force is not so apparent as in express mandates or prohibitions, especially upon advice and consultation going before.

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[4.] Where understanding therefore is necessary^[8], in those things Reason is the director of man's Will by discovering in action what is good. For the Laws of well-doing are the dictates of right Reason. Children, which are not as yet come to those years at which they may have; again, innocents, which are excluded by natural defect from ever having; thirdly, madmen, which for the present cannot possibly have the use of right Reason to guide themselves, have for their guide the Reason that guides other men, which are tutors over them to seek and to procure their good for them. In the rest there is that light of Reason, by which good may be known from evil, and which when it discovers good rightly terms it right^[9].

[5.] The Will notwithstanding does not incline to have or do that which Reason teaches to be good, unless the same does also teach it to be possible. For although the Appetite, being more general, may wish anything which seems good, be it never so impossible;[10] yet for such things the reasonable Will of man does never seek. Let Reason teach impossibility in anything, and the Will of man does let it go; a thing impossible it does not affect, the impossibility thereof being manifest.

[6.] There is in the Will of man naturally that freedom, by which it is apt to take or refuse any particular object whatever being presented to it. Whereupon it follows, [223] that there is no particular object so good, [that] it may [not] have the show of some difficulty or unpleasant quality annexed to it, in respect of which the Will may shrink and decline it; contrariwise (for so things are blended) there is no particular evil which has not some appearance of goodness by which to insinuate itself. For evil as evil cannot be desired: if that be desired which is evil, the cause is the goodness which is or seems to be joined with it.[11] Goodness does not move by being, but by being apparent; and therefore many things are neglected which are most precious, only because the value of them lies hid. Sensible Goodness is most apparent, near, and present; which causes the Appetite to be therewith strongly provoked. Now pursuit and refusal in the Will do follow, the one the affirmation the other the negation of goodness, which the understanding apprehends, grounding itself upon sense, unless some higher Reason do chance to teach the contrary. And if Reason have taught it rightly to be good, yet not so apparently that the mind receives it with utter impossibility of being otherwise, still there is place left for the Will to take or leave. Whereas therefore among so many things as are to be done, there are so few, the goodness of which Reason in such sort does or easily can discover, we are not to marvel at the choice of evil even then when the contrary is probably known. Hereby it comes to pass that custom inuring the mind by long practice, and so leaving there a sensible impression, prevails more than reasonable [224] persuasion in whatever way. Reason therefore may rightly discern the thing which is good, and yet the Will of man not incline itself thereto, as oft as the prejudice of sensible experience does oversway.

[7.] Nor let any man think that this does make anything for the just excuse of iniquity. For there was never sin committed, in which a less good was not preferred before a greater, and that willfully; which cannot be done without the singular disgrace of Nature, and the utter disturbance of that divine order, by which the preeminence of highest acceptance[12] is by the best things worthily challenged. There is no good which concerns us but has evidence enough for itself, if Reason were diligent to search it out. Through neglect thereof, abused we are with the show of that which is not; sometimes the subtilty of Satan inveigling us as it did Eve,[13] sometimes the hastiness of our Wills preventing the more considerate advice of sound Reason, as in the Apostles,[14] when they no sooner saw what they liked not, but they forthwith were desirous of fire from heaven; sometimes the very custom of evil making the heart obdurate against whatever instructions to the contrary, as in them over whom our Saviour spoke weeping, "O Jerusalem, how often, and thou wouldest not!" (Matt. 23:37). Still therefore that with which we stand blameable, and can no way excuse it, is, In doing evil, we prefer a less good before a greater, the greatness whereof is by reason investigable and may be known. The search of knowledge is a thing painful; and the painfulness of knowledge is that which makes the Will so hardly inclinable thereto. The root of this, divine malediction; by which the instruments being weakened with which the soul (especially in reasoning) does work, it prefers rest in ignorance before wearisome labour to know.[15] For a spur of diligence therefore we have a natural thirst after knowledge ingrafted in us. But by reason of that original weakness in the instruments, without which the understanding part is not [225] able in this world by discourse to work, the very thought[16] of painfulness is as a bridle to stay us. For which cause the Apostle, who knew right well that the weariness of the flesh is a heavy clog to the Will, strikes mightily upon this key, "Awake thou that sleepest; Cast off all which presses down; Watch; Labour; Strive to go forward, and to grow in knowledge." [17]

[1] [Hooker: wits]

[2] Sallust, [[*The Catilinarian Conspiracy*, 21]].

[3] Matt. 6:2.

[4] [Hooker: prefer before the leaving of it undone]

[5] [Hooker: conceit]

[6] [Hooker: privity]

[7] [Hooker: listed]

[8] [Hooker: needs]

[9] [Hooker: and which discovering the same rightly is termed right]

[10] O mihi præteritos referat si Jupiter annos! ["Oh if only Jupiter would bring back to me the years gone by!"] [[Virgil, *Aeneid*, 8.560]].

[11] Εἰ δέ τις ἐπὶ κακίαν ὁρμᾷ πρῶτον μὲν οὐχ ὥς ἐπὶ κακίαν αὐτὴν ὁρμήσει, ἀλλ' ὥς ἐπ' ἀγαθόν. Paulo post: Ἀδύνατον γὰρ ὁρμᾶν ἐπὶ κακὰ βουλόμενον ἔχειν αὐτὰ, οὔτε ἐλπίδι ἀγαθοῦ οὔτε φόβῳ μείζονος κακοῦ. ["If anyone pursues evil, he shall first pursue it not as something evil, but as something good. . . . For is it impossible to pursue evil things unless one wants to have them either out of hope of the good, or out of fear greater evil."] Alcinous, *De Dogmate Platonis* [*On the Teaching of Plato*].

[12] [Hooker: of chiefest acceptation]

[13] 2 Cor. 11:3.

[14] Luke 9:54.

[15] "A corruptible body is heavy unto the soul, and the earthly mansion keepeth down the mind that is full of cares. And hardly can we discern the things that are upon earth, and with great labour find we out the things which are before us. Who can then seek out the things that are in heaven?" Wis. 9:15-16.

[16] [Hooker: conceit]

[17] Eph. 5:14; Heb. 12:1, 12; 1 Cor. 16:13; Prov. 2:4; Luke 13:24.

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