



Volition and Allied Causal Concepts

Avi Sion

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Volition and Allied Causal Concepts is a work of aetiology and metapsychology. Aetiology is the branch of philosophy and logic devoted to the study of causality (the cause-effect relation) in all its forms; and metapsychology is the study of the basic concepts common to all psychological discourse, most of which are causal. Volition (or free will) is to be distinguished from causation and natural spontaneity. The latter categories, i.e. deterministic causality and its negation, have been treated in a separate work, *The Logic of Causation*. Volition may be characterized as personal causality, a relation between an agent (the self or soul) and his actions (acts of will). Unlike causation, this relation cannot be entirely defined using conditional (if-then) propositions. Although we can say that the agent is a sine qua non of his actions, we cannot say that the agent is invariably (in all or specific circumstances) followed by his actions. It appears that both an act of will and its negation remain possible to a soul in any given set of circumstances. This defines freedom of the will, and implies the responsibility of the agent for his actions. Introspection provides knowledge of particular acts of will. The existence of freewill implies a distinction between necessary causation (determinism independent of volition) and inertial causation (determinism, except when some contrary will interferes). An act of will occurs on a spiritual plane. It may have natural (mental or physical) consequences; those that inevitably follow it may be regarded as directly willed, whereas those that vary according to circumstances must be considered indirectly willed. Volition presupposes some degree of consciousness. So-called involuntary acts of will involve a minimum of attention, whereas mindful acts are fully conscious. Even pure whim involves intention. Most volitions moreover involve valuation, some sort of projection of goals, deliberation on means, choice and decision. To judge responsibility, various distinctions are called for, like that between intentional, incidental and accidental consequences. Volitional action can be affected through the terms and conditions of the world surrounding its agent, but also more intimately through the influence of concrete or abstract aspects of that world that the subject has cognized. The causal concept of influence, and its implication of cognition (of inner or outer information, including emotions), are crucial to measuring the effort involved in volition. Influences make willing easier or harder, yet do not curtail its essential freedom. All the causal concepts used in psychological explanation – affections, appetites, instincts, habits, obsessions, compulsions, urges and impulses – can be elucidated thanks to this important finding. Much of human (and animal) behavior can thus be both acknowledged as volitional and as variously influenced. *Volition and Allied Causal Concepts* is a work of ambitious scope, intent on finally resolving philosophical and logical issues that have always impeded progress in psychology. It clarifies the structure and workings of the psyche, facilitating hygienic and therapeutic endeavors. The relation between volition and physical laws is discussed, as is the place of volition in biology. Concepts used in biology, analogous to that of purpose, are incidentally analyzed. Theological issues are also dealt with, as are some topics in ethics and law.

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