

**FREE WILL AND FOUR  
ENGLISH  
PHILOSOPHERS: HOBBS,  
LOCKE, HUME AND MILL**

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Free Will and Four English Philosophers: Hobbes, Locke, Hume and Mill by Joseph Rickaby

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**JOSEPH RICKABY**

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# FREE WILL

AND FOUR ENGLISH PHILOSOPHERS · (HOBBS, LOCKE  
HUME AND MILL) · BY THE  
REV. JOSEPH RICKABY, S.J.

*"The belief in freedom  
is at the root of our entire  
conception of personality"  
—Mallock, *Reconstruction of  
Belief**

London  
BURNS AND OATES  
28 Orchard Street W  
1906

5764.2.2

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## THE PREFACE

IN their original form these pages were written in the years 1871-4. Since then they have been submitted to much castigation and amendment, less perhaps than they deserve, at the hands of the writer, then youthful, now an elderly man. This fact may account for some inequalities of style. Certain "tender memories of the past" have stayed my hand from pruning away all traces of the exuberance of youth.

Meanwhile the importance of the subject has grown rather than diminished, chiefly, I think, owing to the prevalence of the Kantian philosophy. I may as well forewarn the reader that Kant is not discussed here, except indirectly, in so far as the phenomenalism of Hume may be considered to have prepared the way for Kant. I have written elsewhere: "Though men are slow to see it and loth to own it,—from reminiscences I think of the *odium theologicum* hanging about the question,—free will still remains the hub and centre of philosophical speculation."\* In this work the subject is treated entirely on philosophical grounds: that is to say, there is no reference to grace, predestination, or the Fall. Thus St Augustine stands out of the controversy: so too Calvin and Jansenius. My

\* "Free Will in God and Man," pp. 142-155, in the Second Series of my *Oxford and Cambridge Conferences*, 1900-1901: see also in my *Political and Moral Essays*, 1902, an Essay on "Morality without Free Will."

method is to quote a passage from the English philosopher under examination, and then discuss it. The method has its drawbacks, but it ensures definiteness, and seems about as fair to the philosopher discussed as any other form of procedure. It is not the writer's fault if the reader has not his Hobbes, or his Locke, or his Hume by his side, and does not read round and study in the context the extract presented to him.

The *fact* that man has free will is far more certain, —it is a point of Catholic faith,—than any explanation *how* he has it. As to how free will works, the Church has given no explanation: there is much divergence even of orthodox opinion, and, wherever my reading has travelled, considerable obscurity. The fact is usually proved by the indirect method of enlarging upon the consequences of a denial of free will. That method I too have frequently employed. But further I offer some positive view of the precise working of free will. I have not borrowed it from Locke. I arrived at the view, or rather was led into it, in the year 1868; and it has satisfied my mind ever since. It will be found, however, to approximate to a view put forward, on second thoughts, by Locke.\* The view I take is briefly this. To will at all, our will must be struck by a motive, which raises in us what I have called a "spontaneous complacency." As the four philosophers under review all agree, and I agree with them, this complacency is a fact of physical sequence, a necessity, under the circumstances. But it is not yet a volition. It does not become a volition until it is

\* See Extract 8 from Locke, pp. 100-104.



hugged, embraced, enhanced, under advertence, by the conscious self. This process takes time,—I do not mean so many seconds measured by the watch, for thought time goes on other wheels than motion time,—but still it takes time. Free will turns upon the absence of any need of your making up your mind at once to accept the particular complacency thus present in your soul: observe, you cannot here and now accept any other; you cannot here and now accept what is not here and now offered; you cannot just at present fling yourself upon the absent. Thus time is gained for rival motives to come up, according to the ordinary laws of association, perception, or personal intercourse: each of these motives excites its own necessary complacency, till at last some present complacency is accepted and endorsed by the person; and that is an act of free will. Not to have a *regressus in infinitum*, we must further observe that no volition is requisite simply to hesitate, delay, and withhold your acceptance of any present complacency,—in fact, to remain undecided and irresolute. You may, of course, put forth a positive volition to wait and see more of the question: all I say is that such a positive volition is not indispensable; your will may hang fire without your resolving to be irresolute: which important point Locke never came clearly to remark.

This explanation may not account for free will in God and in His holy angels; but in so difficult a matter it is much if we can form some theory which a philosopher may debate, and a sound theologian will not bar as “heretical,” “erroneous,” or “temerarious.”

I may add that while I am much concerned that my reader should not be a determinist, I am comparatively indifferent whether he accepts my explanation of free will, or any other, or regards the process as inexplicable.

J. R.

*Pope's Hall, Oxford,  
Midsummer, 1906.*

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