

# The Concept of Will in Waismann

KALI CHARAN PANDEY

Lecturer in Philosophy

Government College

Dharamshala

A sign of strong character, when once the resolution has been taken, to shut the ear even to the best counter-arguments. Occasionally, therefore, a *will* to stupidity.

Friedrich Nietzsche

*Beyond Good and Evil*, Sec. 107

I have underlined the term 'will' in the above quotation in order to focus at our discussion: whether the concept of will is dichotomous? We shall discuss this issue in the light of Friedrich Waismann's views on the indeterminate and ambivalent nature of human will in his book *Will and Motive*. In order to crystallize the thesis that will contains mutually conflicting elements, we shall delve into will's aptness or in-aptness with wish, action and motive.

Human will is regarded as a link between wish and action, and also as a process, which consists of wish, desire, motive, and action. As the nature of the process of willing differs from person to person and from situation to situation, willing could be of innumerable types. According to Waismann, will could broadly be classified into following categories:<sup>1</sup>

- a. I will remember something.
- b. I will deal with a mathematical problem.
- c. I will not think of it.
- d. I will revenge myself for an insult.
- e. I will start a new life and become a different person.
- f. I will submit to my fate.
- g. I will yield to evil.
- h. I will believe in God.
- i. I will not live.
- j. I will return to the past.
- k. I will not will.

The view that human will is dichotomous, indeterminate, and ambivalent upholds that parallel to a will, there exists a contrary will. In some cases of willing, the contrary will is so weak that it seems that there is but one will. As Waismann says, 'Under the influence of a strong emotion we seem to be able to perform great act of will because the contrary will is weakened.'<sup>2</sup> But this is true about most, if not all, of our wills that a will is divided into 'to have and not to have'. The prominent reasons for this ambiguous nature of will according to Waismann, could be as: (i) First of all, it is not certain as to where wish gets converted into will. (ii) A will of a 'strong-willed' person is different from that of a 'weak-willed' person. This difference lies in the fact that whereas latter has to make great efforts 'to make even the smallest decision', former's decisions are effortless. As Waismann says, 'Perhaps no other group of people makes desperate efforts than hopeless failures like alcoholics, drug addicts and 'weak-willed' dreamers who constantly run up against their own nature and constantly succumb to it.'<sup>3</sup> (iii) Like Waismann, Buddhists' *Pratityasamutpada* theory also maintains that the ultimate cause of will is ignorance. Waismann says, 'Acting and willing are possible only because the future is hidden from us: the will requires uncertainty. If I were completely ignorant, I could not will; and if I were omniscient, able to look into the most distant future, I could not will either. Willing is possible only in the grey area between knowledge and ignorance.'<sup>4</sup> The uncertainty not only causes the will but also constitutes its nature. (iv) The context of will affects its nature. (v) The will of a theoretically minded person is different from that of a passionate and emotional person. The will of a theoretically minded person, who weighs pros and cons and then takes a decision, 'is not very good at practical action, whereas the man of action can hardly have any clear and unbiased views about the nature of the will'.<sup>5</sup> This is precisely because 'in a passion the field of vision narrows; any strong but dubious conviction has the same effect, as when I am absolutely convinced that I am right. Skepticism widens the view and therefore leads to indecision.'<sup>6</sup> (vi) There is no inner criteria which can distinguish a willed action from the one performed under the influence of someone else.<sup>7</sup> (vii) it is difficult to say as to what constitutes the will. On the basis of above described reasons it can be said that it is 'possible to will and not to will the same thing: either in the loose sense in which one wills A but not B even though one cannot reach A without B; or in the strict sense in which one either feels two opposed movements of the will—two impulses—in oneself or wills A but has an unconscious conterwill'.<sup>8</sup>

Wittgenstein says: 'It makes sense to ask: "Do I really love her, or

am I only pretending to myself?" and the process of introspection is the calling up of memories; of imagined possible situations, and of the feelings that one would have it...<sup>9</sup> Here Wittgenstein tries to make the distinction between 'real love' and 'pretension'. When one really loves another, one loves to love—one wills to love. On the other hand, in pretending to love there is no love—one wills not to love. Both of these cases of willing are cases in which a will is supposed to be voluntary. My will to love or to pretend is a conscious effort. In other words, from the point of view of willing, both love as well as pretension is voluntary. But what does the 'voluntary will' mean then? Is there 'involuntary will' too? In answering these questions one can say 'well, the distinction between voluntary will and involuntary will is very much obvious. A person on the basis of his will joins army and kills enemies. His decision to join the army is voluntary. On the other hand, while walking through a jungle stumbling on a snake shall be categorised as an voluntary happening.'

According to Wittgenstein, 'Imagination is voluntary, memory involuntary, but calling someone to mind is voluntary.'<sup>10</sup> For Wittgenstein memory is involuntary will because in it there is no 'trying' or 'attempting', i.e. there is no wish. A memory is not a wishful thought. A memory is always painful. Whether the memory is of the happiness of the past or miseries of the past, it remains troublesome. If the past was happy, one misses it; and the memories of unhappy past makes one only sad. But recalling something is voluntary because there is a conscious act on one's part. Further, imagination is voluntary because in it mind is guided in a certain direction. And a reverie is involuntary because it is effortless and devoid of any intention. In brief, it can be said that a voluntary will is the one which is intentional, for example going to cinema or tour, studying etc., and actions such as talking to oneself, reveries, sleep-walking and action during extreme intoxication are non-intentional and involuntary manifestations of human will.

Let us see whether the distinction between voluntary and involuntary will, is really obvious?

The view which maintains the distinction between voluntary will and involuntary will argues that (1) I know that the will is voluntary or involuntary, and (2) the other persons, at least those who are close to me, can predict my behaviour in certain situations, on the basis of their knowledge about my reactions, i.e. they can make the distinction between my genuine and masqueraded behaviour. Take for example, my friend who is intimate to me, can tell me as to whether I am happy or pretending to be so.

Let us take up the argument (2) first. It presupposes that one's behaviour could reveal the will behind it. For example when I see that someone has met with an accident and howling in pain I presume that he seeks some help. It is logically possible that in some cases in which I presume someone to be in pain, on the basis of his behaviour, but he actually is not in pain and only pretending to be so, hence I may be wrong in my presupposition. Nonetheless as Wittgenstein has shown in his critique of the private language that mistakes are very much grounded in reality, so even if I am wrong in my presupposition that the person is in pain or not, the thesis that behaviour reveals the will turns out to be correct. However, there are deeper problems with this thesis. In so many cases it is not possible to decide whether will is voluntary or involuntary. Two examples of such kind are given by Wittgenstein which are as follows:

1. 'When a child stamps its feet and howls with rage, who would say it was doing this involuntarily? And why? Why is it assumed to be doing this not involuntarily?'<sup>11</sup>
2. 'A movement of my body, of which I don't know that it is taking place or has taken place, will be called involuntary—but how is it when I merely *try* to lift a weight, and so there isn't a movement? And what would it be like if someone involuntarily strained to lift a weight? Under what circumstances would this behaviour be called 'involuntary'.'<sup>12</sup>

Wittgenstein's examples show that there are cases where the distinction between voluntary will and involuntary will collapse.

Similarly, argument (1) is also untenable. At times, it is not possible to be clear about the nature of one's own will. Even if there is a motive and one acts in order to achieve that, it is possible that the action is taking place without will. This dual nature of human will has been distinctly depicted by Sartre in his conception of bad faith. Bad faith is the kind of belief in which the subject keeps two apparently opposite wills. In this context, it is entertaining to go into the following remark of Fredrick Waismann:

Incidentally, the perspective in which we see things changes: the moment I am faced with an important practical decision I will be imbued with the feeling that this decision comes entirely from inside me, that the choice is, as it were entirely in my hands. When I look at the same decision again from a temporal distance, free of all the tendencies that governed me at the time, and when I view my own past with a knowing and searching eye and call to mind what I was and what forces and influences impinged on me, I will perhaps be inclined to say that my decision expressed that whole

direction of my life at the time and could not very well have turned out otherwise. To have acted differently I would have had to be a different person.<sup>13</sup>

Thus the indecision as to what I will and what I do not will is a fact of life. So, it is meaningful to say that there are cases in which it is difficult to pinpoint that the particular will is voluntary or involuntary.

The distinction between voluntary will has deeper repercussions. It presupposes that human beings are endowed with freedom of will. It maintains that in the case of voluntary will a human being is free to act this way or that. It also maintains that a man is free not only in action but also in his ideas.

The freedom of the will is the pedestal of public morality because unless it is presupposed that human being is free to act, he cannot be held responsible for his behaviour/action. Appreciation, condemnation, resentment, request for a favour, choice and other aspects of human behaviour presuppose that human will is free. Like human behaviour, wish also presupposes the will to be free. When I wish somebody to achieve something or wish for the availability of a certain state of affairs for myself, there is an underlying presupposition that the person for whom I wish, or I myself could proceed in the direction of the goal. Of course, there are wishes which are not possible for me to achieve, for example the wish to fly like a bird. These unachievable wishes do not require the will to be free because these kinds of wishes remain at the level of idea and do not conflict with the human will. Although freedom of the will is the foundation of morality, moralists are not unanimous whether man is free to will or not. There have been inconclusive discussions between compatibilists (i.e. those who believe that man is free to chose and act as per his will) and incompatibilists (i.e. those who believe that all events including human wills and thoughts are causally predetermined). Moreover, often the argumentation on the freedom of human will takes the shape of: (a) determinism (or necessitarianism), (b) indeterminism (or liberalism) and self-determinism (or compatibilism).

All these discussions on the freedom of the will are of no interest to Waismann. For him it is incorrect to say that human will is free or that it is not free. It is not human will but human action, which could be said to be free or not to be free. He says, 'I cannot ... say either that human beings are free or that they are unfree. Both views are false, both pictures are at variance with reality. Free—unfree: these are predicates of actions (I act freely if I am not constrained) rather than of

the will. Freedom enters, as it were, into a chemical bond with the will.'<sup>14</sup> Waismann's arguments that freedom is the predicate of action rather than of human will, could be reformulated as given below.

For Waismann, a will is free, means there is no obstacle in human choice. He opines, 'Now, if I were to say that the act of choosing is the final deciding factor, I would be a believer in free will.'<sup>15</sup> If one is free in his act of choice, his will is free. But he denies that human choice is unconditional. He says:

I do not believe in such a mystical act, an act that puts an end to vacillation by as it were, tipping the scales. For we cannot rule out the possibility that there is something else behind the choice and the conflict of motives: innate dispositions, enduring traces of previous decisions, momentary influences arising from our personal lives, influences which can perhaps be felt but are difficult to grasp, interests or inclinations we are not clear about, or would not like to admit openly and without reservations. The decision I make may not therefore be the result of a simple act of will.<sup>16</sup>

He further says, 'In short, although experience shows that we choose between possibilities, this does not prove in any way that this choice is something final and uncaused, that it is not in turn conditioned by many other factors—perhaps even by processes occurring at a deeper level.'<sup>17</sup> Although Waismann upholds that the act of choice is affected by 'the whole variety of processes, inner as well as outer', and hence he believes that will is not free in the true sense of the term, he says that he does not believe in determinism. For determinism, we live in the universe which is governed by immutable causal law; the principle of causality is unconditional and universally applicable. Since the cause of every phenomenon is determined, according to determinism, the future—in physical as well as mental realms—is quite predictable. Waismann denies determinism because he holds that the predictability principle has no justification. In his words, '...if we could say that under such and such circumstances this person will act in such and such a way and under those circumstances in that other way, irrespective of any struggles or conflicts going on inside him (for the formula has already taken all this into account)— then and only then would it be shown that he really had no choice and that the belief in freedom of the will was an illusion. Now in actually fact we cannot predict a person's behaviour, or only with some degree of uncertainty.'<sup>18</sup> Thus for Waismann human will is free to the extent that the act of choice is unconditional, i.e. it is not affected by mental conditions of the subject. As it is difficult to say that there is any such choice, human will is 'linked with antecedents from

which the decisions arises, But this is not to say that the will is predetermined because the predictability of physics is not/cannot be applicable to human will. He denies both free will and determinism and accepts that the question whether will is determined or not determined is a pseudo question.

It appears from the above analysis of Waismann's view on the nature of the will, that Waismann is an incompatibilist. For him, freedom is incompatible with determinism. Unlike Spinoza, Hume, Hobbes, Leibniz, Locke and other compatibilists he rejects the reconciliation between determinism and freedom. Waismann, unlike compatibilists, altogether denounces determinism on the ground that the criterion of determinism, i.e. predictability is not applicable in the domain of human behaviour. The question arises: what is the criterion to decide whether something has been willed? Is subjective experience the criteria of the will? Waismann denies that subjective experience or introspection is the criteria of the decision whether something was willed or not.

In order to show that will does not remain the level of experience, it is pertinent to distinguish between will, wish and action. Wish is an idea. When this idea is converted into action, it takes the form of will. Waismann distinguishes between will and wish in his following remark:

I am lying in bed in the morning and would like to get up. I see that it is already quite late, I have much to do, and I should be getting up. I take a run-up, as it were, and—remain lying. The room is cold and uncomfortable, I feel tired—in short, I do not get up. And yet I sincerely wish to put an end to this to-ing and fro-ing and get out of bed; I even have a very strong wish to do so, and I am cross with myself for still being in bed; perhaps I have the wish to be the kind of person who could jump out of bed without any difficulty. But all this remains in the realms of wishing; I have not yet willed. I have willed only when I actually get up. As long as I only considered getting up, imagined it, or wished for it, what I was doing, was no more than wishing. What has to be added to turn it into willing was the act.<sup>19</sup>

Thus wishing along with action gives rise to will. This gives rise to the question: is it the case that willing is not possible without wishing? Does wish precede will? No, there are instances where willing arises even without wishing. For example, suppose while driving I see that a cat is lying hurt just in front of my car, and I put my leg on the break. I take the cat to the hospital. There is no wishing, no thought, and no intention in putting my leg on the break and taking the cat to the hospital. It was the spontaneous reaction of my body. My this behaviour is similar to

the case in which after incidentally putting my finger on the electric current I just take it out. Not only that willing is possible even if wish is absent, willing can be against wishing. As Waismann says, 'Willing can ... go against wishing. I can will something and wish, and I can will something I do not wish.'<sup>20</sup> Thus the relationship between wish, will and action is extremely intricate. Each one of the trio may include the other two or may completely exclude them. A wish can exist with or without will and action. Likewise, an action can take place with or without wish and will. Similarly, not only it is possible that a will begins with wish and results in an action but this is also possible that it is devoid of action.

In fact wish is subjective feeling and will brings objectivity to it. Here, objectivity need not mean external phenomena. A will can very well be related with internal phenomena such as in love. Does this mean that there no difference between wish to love and will to love? In fact the criterion of such distinction lies in the ability to overcome the obstacles. As Waismann says, 'The first lesson to be learned from this is that willing always goes with some resistance and is directed towards overcoming that resistance.'<sup>21</sup> It is important to note here that this overcoming of the obstacles may be done in a negative sense as well; not taking a decision is also a kind of decision. Thus, 'it may take an enormous effort of will to do nothing—to remain calm in the face of a serious insult, or as in previous wars, for soldiers to stand in the front line and calmly accept being shot at. We admire such strength of will just because we can see signs of powerful forces being overcome'.<sup>22</sup> Even if overcoming of some obstacles is necessary for the existence of will, the obstacle should not be such enormous that the individual could not surpass it. All my efforts to convert my wish, of becoming like a bird, into will cannot be successful because of the very nature of the obstacle. In this way, we can say that for the existence of will some resistance is necessary but there is a limit to the intensity of the obstacle. According to Waismann, '... what we call 'will' lies between two limits: between a certain very small resistance below which we do *not yet* speak of willing and a very great resistance beyond which we *no longer* speak of willing.'<sup>23</sup> However, the limits of such resistance are not fixed and it is determined in relation to the nature of the individual and other conditions. What is insurmountable obstacle for one individual may not be so for the other. Moreover, there are cases such as 'I will to be loved' in which it is not possible to say whether one can surpass the obstacles or not. As there is no demarcation of limits of the obstacles, the concept of will is always indeterminate.

The will is supposed to be inseparably related with some motive. If

there is a will, it is a will for something, i.e. for some motive. There are different types of motives. Following Waismann, motives can be divided into three categories: purpose, drives and impulse. Those motives which are necessarily conscious and intentional are 'purpose' motives. The 'drives' are possibly unconscious motives such as jealousy and ambition. Between necessary conscious and possibly conscious motives are those motives which Waismann calls impulse. The examples of impulses are anger, fury etc. Taking into account the multiple facets of motives, Waismann calls them 'interpretation'. An analysis of the relationship between will and motive reveals that often it is difficult to say whether will is determined by motive or is determinant of motive. The distinction between will and motive on the one hand, and the determined and the determinant on the other, is necessary in order not only to judge whether the doer is of strong or of weak character but also to scrutinize the context in which the action has taken place. Generally it is believed that the process of behaviour or action is such that first will chooses the motive and then the subject moves to perform the action in order to attain the motive. But if one reflects upon the question as to what determines the will, it appears that the relationship between will and action is not straightforward. Let us reflect upon this.

The famous old adage 'beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder', upholds that will determines motive. It professes that nothing is beautiful unless it is perceived beautiful. In other words, something is beautiful and good because I like it; nothing is good, beautiful etc., if I do not like it. That is, something is ugly or beautiful because of my liking or disliking for it. Another viewpoint, which is opposite to the above described subjective interpretation, stresses the objectivity of the phenomena such as beautiful, ugly, good etc. It says that I like something because it is beautiful and vice versa is not the case. If other situations are similar then goodness and badness of a thing gets universal appreciation or condemnation. This shows that beauty does not lie in the eye of the beholder but it is very much part of the thing to which it belongs. In fact, both of the above theses have some element of truth. Thus, there are cases in which will, instead of determining a motive, is determined by it.

Waismann puts forth the view that will may determine as well as may be determined by it. He says, 'If we now ask what determines the will, that answer seems to be; the motive. For we generally conceive of a motive as what moves us to do something, and hence, as what sets the will in motion. So the will chooses and determines the motive; but how

can it do that if it is determined by the motive? Further, if the will is determined by some other thing, ... For then the motive would have the power to move, and the will would really be quite superfluous.'<sup>24</sup> Ryle also is of the similar view in his *The Concept of Mind* in which he establishes that 'inner process and motives need not stand in any recognizable relationship'.<sup>25</sup>

It appears from the above views of Waismann and Ryle that it is mysterious as to why one acts in a certain way and not in the other. There is no final justification for the existence of a particular will. Nor there is any explanation for the fact as to why one keeps two apparently opposite wills at the same instance of time. We cannot prove as to why one will predominates the other?

The context of an action determines the nature of will and motive. Will, wish, motive, action are all interdependent and have their independent significance. An important aspect of the study about the nature of an action is to scrutinize as to which of them has played/is playing the predominant role. However, any such study can never claim to be exhaustive because (1) boundaries of notions such as will, wish, motive etc. are porous—these are all mutually inclusive and inscrutable concepts. It is difficult to explain as to where wish ends and will begins (or, whether both of them are parts of a single process or not). (2) Unravelling of the mysteries of human will has no end. Further, the process of willing is non-rational. As Waismann puts it:

... is there not something rational in willing, something I approve of, which arises from reflection and makes me say that it is I who wills? Perhaps there is such a thing; but there is no absolute guarantee: for an inner impulse or urge can masquerade as a rational will, by putting forward quite plausible reasons. I can approve of these reasons; I can believe that it is I who wills—and yet the impetus to all this comes from something totally unknown to me. This is a typical case of 'rationalization'.<sup>26</sup>

The will is not only non-rational but also indeterminate, divided, and ambivalent.

The human will, as Wittgenstein would like to say, is groundless; a rational explanation of will is neither warranted nor sufficient. It belongs to those aspects of life about which nothing can be said. Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that ambivalence is a predicate of the will. Hence it can be said that, as human will contains conflicting elements, the pondering over not only on the behaviour but also on thought of oneself and of others, is a prerequisite of living a harmonious life.

NOTES

1. Friedrich Waismann, *Will and Motive*, eds. Brian McGuinness and Joachim Schulte, tr. Hans Kaal, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht/Boston/London, 1994, p. 62.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 60-1.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
5. *Ibid.*, p.89.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Cf. Friedrich Waismann, *op. cit.*, p. 90.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
9. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, tr. G.E.M. Anscombe, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1976, para 587, p. 154.
10. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, eds. G. H. von Wright and H. Nyman, trs. C.G. Luckhardt and M.A. E. Aue, Blackwell, 1980, appeared in *The Wittgenstein Reader*, ed. Anthony Kenny, Blackwell, Oxford,1994, p. 135.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Friedrich Waismann, *op. cit.*, p. 57.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
24. *Ibid.*, p. xiv.
25. Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, Hutchinson, London, 1949, p. 107f.
26. Friedrich Waismann, *op. cit.*, p. 91.