II.—ATTENTION AND WILL: A STUDY IN INVOLUNTARY ACTION¹.

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I.

THERE is a kind of Involuntary Action which, though not coextensive with the popular use of the word, has a deeper and more coherent meaning. To distinguish it, we have to set aside the popular use, as confusing this distinction. To avoid this confusion, we must have different terms; and the terms involuntary and non-voluntary are suitable for the purpose. The first implies the presence of Will: the second, its absence. But the meaning of the first is more fully brought out when contrasted with a third variety, which, in conjunction with the other two, leads to a threefold classification of all actions, as Voluntary, Non-voluntary, or Involuntary. The first and last imply Will: but the first, as identified with Will; the last, as opposed to it. I have thought that the study of Involuntary Action, especially where it is realised not accidentally, but through the strength of the antecedent idea or tendency, throws some new and unexpected light on the intimate nature of the voluntary process. The lower levels of conation have been successfully analysed by modern psychologists, but where conation rises into volition the analysis offered is inadequate, and often vitiated by a false method.

Some advance has been made of late by the general prominence which has been given to Attention. "The common factor in all voluntary action alike," says Dr Ward, "seems to be a change in the distribution of attention under the influence of feeling²." A similar view is expressed by Prof. James:—"Volition is nothing but attention³," and "attention with effort is all that

¹ A portion of this paper was read before the Aristotelian Society.

² *Mind*, XII. p. 64.

³ *Prin. of Psych.* Vol. I. p. 447.

any case of volition implies¹. "The essential achievement of the will," he assures us, "when it is most 'voluntary', is to attend to a difficult object and hold it fast before the mind": this "is the *fiat*" of the will². And writers of different schools seem to reach substantially the same conclusion. Thus the conception of an inner activity, which may be regarded as either thought, attention, or will, is the standpoint of those who apply psychologically the fundamental conception of the Kantian theory of knowledge. So Höffding says: "we speak of volition wherever we are conscious of activity, and are not entirely receptive³." And again: "in all memory and synthesis there is manifested an activity... which we call attention, when ...it is brought strongly into play⁴." Prof. Sully's treatment of the "active consciousness" has a similar result. Two phases, he says, are "always present in our active states, *viz.* attention and muscular consciousness." "The order of presentations and ideas has its passive side, as determined by external conditions and the laws of suggestion. From this we can mark off that active or conative factor which appears as soon as we begin to modify and control these passive sequences by attention⁵." According to Mr Shadworth Hodgson, this "fact or moment of attention is that which distinguishes voluntary from spontaneous redintegration⁶." A flash of light arrests the attention. "We pause to say, What is that?" "The reaction expressed in the *what is that?* is the precise moment of attention⁷." "All volition consists in this sort of reaction⁸."

Now volition may indeed be regarded in a broad sense as this inner activity of thought or attention; but while all attention is conation, it is usual to insist that the term volition is not to be applied, until some idea of a result to be achieved has arisen as a psychical antecedent of the action. Hence volition comes to be identified, not with attention at large, but with that species of attention which is directed to ideas, in external volition to motor ideas, in internal to the idea of some change to be effected in a psychical state.

But as mere expectation is not volition, and as, in other ways, we often attend to ideas without the will to realise them, something further is needed to complete the conception. "It is will," says Mr Bradley, "when an idea produces its existence⁹." When, on the other hand, this existence has not been anticipated in idea, or where the antecedent idea and its sub-

¹ *Prin. of Psych.* Vol. II. p. 561.

² *Outlines of Psychology*, p. 313.

³ *The Human Mind*, Vol. II. p. 176.

⁴ *Ph. of Reflection*, Vol. I. p. 29.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 293.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 95.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 292.

⁹ *Mind*, Vol. XIII. p. 25.

sequent realisation are either a casual sequence, or, as sometimes in expectation, the realisation is not the work of the idea, the result may be thought, but it is not volition.

Thus volition is that process of attention to an idea which leads to its subsequent realisation in whole or part. But the question arises, whether this definition does not exclude ideomotor action, which many regard as the type of all volition. The sequence of the idea and the movement in which it consists does not necessarily involve attention: as while I am writing an obscure idea of walking about the room may arise and produce the movement, while the attention remains fixed on a disconnected train of thought. Thus ideomotor action is conation but not volition, where it excludes attention. The question is one of a broader or narrower definition of the word, and we shall find good reasons in the sequel for giving it the narrower meaning, and for insisting on attention as an essential characteristic of all volition.

We have now to apply this conception to the facts of which it is offered as the interpretation: above all to the distinction between voluntary and involuntary action.

The classification of attention as voluntary, non-voluntary, and involuntary, presents the first difficulty. For if one kind of attention is volition, namely attention to an idea, it would seem that must be the voluntary attention. How can it be volition, and at the same time be non-voluntary or involuntary? Yet it is quite clear that attention to an idea may be either non-voluntary or involuntary. But if involuntary, how can the accomplishment of that idea constitute a volition? Again if volition is an idea realised through attention, what is involuntary attention, which seems to present a similar character? The meaning which the classification naturally suggests is that volition is not the same agency as attention,—that when the will is directed to the attention it becomes voluntary; when absent non-voluntary; when opposed involuntary. But this meaning is not reconcileable with our definition of volition.

We have seen that some idea of the result accomplished is an essential constituent of all voluntary action. We may then give this meaning to the classification. When we qualify our attention as non-voluntary, we mean that it occurs without any antecedent idea of so attending; when we qualify it as voluntary, we mean that it occurs through this antecedent idea; when we qualify it as involuntary, we mean that it occurs in spite of this antecedent idea. And, in the same way, we can explain how a volition can be in a sense non-voluntary. We will to move and this volition involves attention to a motor idea. The movement which results is voluntary; but the attention which

partly effected the movement is non-voluntary, because we had no antecedent idea of its direction. So too a volition may be voluntary twice over, if we had both an idea of the movement as well as of the movement of attention. Lastly a volition may also contain an involuntary element; as when a fixed idea possesses us and, to rid ourselves of its persistency, we consent to realise it.

But what of involuntary attention? When it occurs we say we attend *in spite of* the idea of attending to something else. In all complex voluntary attention we direct attention to one object after and in spite of the idea of some contrary direction of attention. How then is involuntary attention or action to be distinguished from complex volition?

A youth about to make his first speech foresees that he will show signs of fear, that he will tremble or turn pale, and perhaps become incoherent. If unaccustomed to the society of the other sex, he is introduced to it for the first time, he foresees the agitation he will feel, though he wills not to feel it. He sees himself awkward, not knowing what to say, and blushing when he is looked at. His action is certainly *involuntary*; but it is an obvious effect of attention to an idea. He attends so much to the idea of how he expects to behave that he inevitably behaves in the way he expected. And his attention is as involuntary as his action. He struggles to divert his attention and to fix it on *any* object that is presented. But a fear due to his inexperience of life and ignorance of his powers at times masters him, and compels him to attend to the humiliating ideas it suggests.

There are three points to notice in this case: (1) The absence of all desire for the action accomplished; (2) the intense effort felt in resisting the dominant idea; (3) the sense of compulsion, the overcoming of our resistance.

(1) "There appears no circumstance," says James Mill, "by which the cases called voluntary are distinguished from the involuntary, except that in the voluntary there exists a Desire¹." "Desire," says Prof. Sully, "constitutes in a greater or less degree an integral element in all true conative processes". "The entertaining of distinctly painful ideas *for their own sake*, that is without any desire to get a secondary result of pleasurable consciousness from so doing, is seen by all to be non-volitional and abnormal²." But there are obvious cases of involuntary action which are not distinguished by the absence of desire, and do not consist 'in the entertaining of pain-

¹ *Analysis of the Human Mind*, Vol. II. p. 350.

² *The Human Mind*, Vol. II. p. 196.

³ *Ibid.* Vol. II. p. 202.

ful ideas for their own sake.' A man may have a morbid craving for drink or opium; and the ideas which move to its satisfaction may at last become irresistible. Or he may take such an unhealthy pleasure in the detail of murder-cases that the idea of committing a murder comes at length to fascinate him. As the idea is passing beyond his self-control, there will occur moments in which he cannot exclude it from his thoughts, in which, though he try his utmost, he cannot succeed in fixing his attention elsewhere. At such times his attention is strictly involuntary, not merely *non-voluntary*. And the pleasure and desire which, according to the theory, ought to constitute it voluntary, by adding strength to the tendencies against which the man is struggling, tend to make it involuntary. It is then futile to attempt to base the distinction between voluntary and involuntary action on the presence of desire in the one, on its absence from the other.

(2) Nor does the feeling of effort distinguish them. This "effort of will," as Prof. James calls it, is certainly present in an intense degree in involuntary action, but it also occurs in many if not most cases of voluntary action.

(3) We come next to the most important characteristic. In involuntary action what we feel is that the resistance of our will is overborne by a dominant idea opposed to it. 'Our will is overborne;' but our will, according to the analysis given of it, means only 'attention to an idea determining its realisation.' It follows that, where the idea is not in any degree realised, there can be no will. Thus if we attend first to one idea, and secondly to an opposite idea, and realise that, then there is volition in respect of the second idea, but not in respect of the first. But, where we are dealing with involuntary action, this account is directly opposite to the fact. Here it is the idea unrealised which the will supports, and the realised idea which the will is opposed to.

Let us pass to Mr Bradley's explanation. We seem, he says, "to go upon the principle that an idea has a normal, absolute or relative, strength, and that anything beyond may therefore be referred to something external to our wills!" Here we seem to be approaching the true ground of the distinction; but this difficulty faces us: volition does not arise until the idea commands the action, yet when this command is perfected, and the one inevitably produces the other, we find that, instead of an ideal type of volition, we may have its extreme opposite involuntary action. How then are we to distinguish them, or draw any other than an arbitrary line between that due control

¹ *Mind*, XIII. p. 32.

of an action by an idea which makes volition and that extreme control which makes involuntary action? Mr Bradley thinks that a criterion may be found in the presence of an opposite idea. If the "impulse had been normal, we feel a counter-idea would have restrained it, and therefore its strength and its result may be looked on as foreign¹." Now if we take away from this explanation the term 'normal' which is precisely that which has to be explained, the explanation amounts to this, that 'if the impulse had been *less strong* (and presumably less strong than the counter-idea), then the counter-idea would have restrained it.' But we cannot infer, because one idea or impulse is not controlled by a counter-idea, that the result is involuntary and the impulse abnormal; for this is the character of all complex volition.

If the failure of the counter-idea to control it, is not an indication of the abnormal strength of an idea, what is? An idea of abnormal strength, we may say, is not merely one which conquers the counter-idea in a given psychosis, but one that, wherever it occur, conquers the counter-idea in that psychosis. This is to go farther than the facts justify: we cannot infer of any idea that in no combination of circumstances will it be successfully opposed. It may conquer in most, but this is no distinguishing feature of involuntary action. In great men we find a similar extraordinary obedience to the leading of one idea. This idea conquers in a variety of circumstances, and gives that unity to their lives which we mark in them.

If we reflect on it, our failure to find a criterion or principle for deciding what is and what is not an idea of abnormal strength is due to our current analysis of volition. From the basis of that theory, we can draw no other than an arbitrary line between them. If we start from a single idea, and consider the various degrees of its control of the action which it represents, we can only mark an arbitrary limit where the degree of strength should be called abnormal. If, on the other hand, we start from a complication of ideas, as in complex volition, and consider the control which one idea exercises over its opponents, then again we can only mark an arbitrary limit where its control passes the normal degree and becomes abnormal. Like the distinction between a few pebbles and a heap, voluntary and involuntary action will coalesce at a point. Let the volition but pass this arbitrary point and it will be transformed into involuntary action, while having as good a title to be still called voluntary as, at a certain point, a few pebbles have to be called such, as a heap. Two ideas are in

¹ *Mind*, XIII. p. 32.

conflict: one is realised in spite of the opposition of the other. This is the type of all complex volition. Where the superiority of the one idea is marked, it makes a strong volition: where the two ideas are more or less on an equality, weakness and indecision results. But why the superior strength of one idea which makes a strong volition should, when one fresh degree of strength is added to it, make us conscious not of greater strength but of weakness and defeat, this remains, on our principles, wholly unintelligible. We cannot base on an arbitrary distinction of this sort the profound difference between voluntary and involuntary action. There is no arbitrary point on approaching which this difference grows less, at which it vanishes. Between the two actions there persists always an irreconcilable difference. The one is always accomplished in opposition to our will; the other through its consent.

Thus we have failed to give any explanation of that feeling of constraint, that overcoming of our resistance, which is the marked characteristic of involuntary action. To the question, who or what is constrained? we can only answer, the counter-idea. To the objection, that one idea or the other must be constrained, we can only answer; the constraining idea is abnormal. To the demand for a criterion of the abnormal idea, we can only supply an arbitrary point, at which voluntary and involuntary pass over into one another.—We can never explain this sense of compulsion, this overcoming of our resistance by increasing to whatever degree the strength of one idea *merely in relation* to a counter-idea. In involuntary action we feel that *we* are conquered; and we cannot explain our defeat as the defeat of one idea by its opponent, or we should be often conquered when our victory is most complete. In some way which the current psychological theory has failed to analyse, we must identify ourselves with the one and oppose the other; so as to be able to say when the one is victorious that *we* have conquered, and when the other is that *we* are overborne. The difference between the normal and abnormal strength of an idea is not an arbitrary difference. The criterion of it is the will. The one is an idea we can control, when we identify ourselves with the idea opposed to it: the other idea we cannot.

II.

"We are then completely in accord with those," says Prof. Ribot, "who deny that the predominance of a motive alone explains volition....It has efficacy only so far as it is chosen, that is to say, so far as it enters as an integral part into the sum

of states which constitute the self at a given moment,...so as to make but one with them¹." But the important question is, in what sense the self at a given moment must be understood, in order that its identification with one of two conflicting ideas may explain volition, and where the opposite idea to the one chosen is realised account for the fact of involuntary action.

In the first place, the self must be selective. There must be some meaning in saying that it is identified with the one idea and motive exclusively, that the motive chosen "entre dans le moi à titre de partie intégrante, à l'exclusion des autres états²." The fulfilment of this condition obliges us to exclude many senses in which the self may be understood. Thus we cannot regard it as the coenaesthesia—the present mass of organic and other sensation; for this is equally present to both of the opposed ideas and in no sense selects either. Nor for the same reason is it any core of sensation which remains relatively stable and unchanged. And again we cannot take this self to mean merely the present mass of thought or awareness of objects: for both ideas are thought about, one only is willed. Nor does thought suffice for this self when desire is added to it: in many cases we desire both of the conflicting alternatives, but the self identifies itself as will with one only. Still perhaps this self is some enlarged desire or interest in the back ground with the systematic thought connected with it. For often we solve the conflict of two desires by invoking a larger interest in which one of them comes to be included; and the connected thought selects one desire. Such an enlarged interest is what we call our good on the whole, or some important part of that good, or the good of others connected with us. But if this self is to be taken to mean our interest in what is reasonable or right, then we must always will such: we cannot will what is unreasonable or wrong. And this, admittedly, is not an opinion which the modern mind can accept. We should say that the higher self chooses what is reasonable or right, but, where the lower self is dominant, that we often prefer to it a momentary pleasure. And if the self of the moment may be either one which on reflection we regard as a higher or a lower self, then it cannot be universally this more comprehensive thought-interest in which one of the particular thoughts is assimilated. What then is the mark of the thought which is the self, and in its outcome volition? In involuntary action there are two antagonistic representations, each assimilated by its own particular body of thought. Which body of thought is the self? Is it the dominant thought which is accomplished or the weaker

¹ *Les Maladies de la Volonté*, p. 32.

² *Ibid.* p. 36.

thought which is frustrated? If you take the first alternative, you deny the fact of involuntary action: if you take refuge from it in the second, you affirm that Will must be an abortive process. It is neither universally: and as the self may be either a lower or a higher, so it may be either the dominant or frustrated thought. We cannot specify any distinctive character of thought as such, which, in its exclusive identification with one representation, marks it as the self of the moment and constitutes volition. We can but impotently suggest that the body of thought so identified which is the self of the moment, is also volition; and, conversely, that the body of thought which is volition, is also the self of the moment. Tell me which representation is willed, and I can tell you with which the self is identified, and *vice versa*. In involuntary action, we clearly recognise that the dominant idea is opposed to the self, and the thwarted idea identified with it; but this artificial phrase is only another way of saying that we will to realise the one and to restrain the other. And as we have failed to detect what Will is, so we cannot discover that momentary self from which it is inseparable.

But one negative result is at least certain; the identification of the self which constitutes volition is in some way different from that identification which means merely the assimilation of a particular idea into the body of thought which apperceives it. In complex volition, there is more than one such body of thought; but while there may be two opposite assimilations in the voluntary process, in no proper sense can there be said to be two volitions: and in involuntary action the dominant assimilation is its direct opposite.

Thus, if this more recent theory has the merit of recognising the self as an essential factor in voluntary action, it still has no clear conception of the concrete character of this self. It falls into the same mistake as the other theories, and will try to account for volition by thought, and its setting of pleasure, pain, desire, and effort. Instead of the more simple conception of one idea overcoming an opposing idea and determining action, we have the more complex conception of its previous assimilation into a body of thought and interest. Like the simpler theories, it falls into this dilemma; unless it insist on the realisation of what in the first stage of the voluntary process is merely thought of or desired, it cannot distinguish mere thought from will: and if it insist, it cannot distinguish will from involuntary action. As Prof. Ribot admits; "*Considérée comme état de conscience, la volition n'est donc rien de plus qu'une affirmation (ou une négation)*".¹ If it is a judgment

¹ *Op. cit.* p. 29.

that affirms the tendencies of action, all judgment of tendency is not volition. If, further, it expect some result to take place, all expectation is not volition. If, lastly, the expectation be qualified with pleasure and desire, all agreeable expectation is not volition. One man may desire the death of another, and expect it; but he does not therefore will to murder him.

What then must occur in a process of thought or attention to ideas before it can become volition in any sense that will enable us to distinguish voluntary from involuntary action? Though we do not know what this decisive event is, we may at least give it the name which common usage appropriates for it. We name it Will: and if the attempts of psychologists to explain it as some combination of the factors present in conative processes, as pleasure, pain, desire, sense of effort, the tendency of an idea to realise itself, attention and assimilation into a body of thought and interest—if these attempts fail, we are led to suspect that will is no mere combination of other constituents, and, conversely, cannot be analysed into them.

III.

A common assumption, a common prejudice, stands in the way of this conclusion. Though we accept the theory of evolution, though the biological conception of development has transformed the method of psychology, yet, in one department, we are still unconsciously bound by the methods of the older psychologist. We have rejected, as we think, their atomistic psychology, their shallow attempt to build up the higher psychical processes by putting together the elements found in the lower; yet we do not recognise that the current theories of will are so many exemplifications of this combinational method. We take Will as the higher level of the conative development; and then show that it is nothing new but only a regrouping and complication of the constituents of lower conative levels. And what is the consequence? When we come to the higher level we are unable to interpret it. Pleasure and pain, desire, sense of effort, ideas moving to their realisation, complex thought-processes which assimilate them, are present at a stage which, if you like to call it Will, is not Will in any sense that will enable you to interpret the fundamental distinction between voluntary and involuntary actions,—taking the last in a close sense, as actions which through the dominance of the antecedent idea of them, thwart Will and accomplish themselves. In all this it does not occur to us that in the growing complexity of the process which marks the uprising of Will a “transforma-

tion" may have been effected, and that Will may be as much a specific differentiation of conation as the various class-sensations are recognised to be differentiations of a common sensibility. What would now be thought of a psychologist who, starting from a level at which there were organic and tactile but no visual sensations, attempted to explain the latter as some regrouping of these more primitive sensations? Yet this is the very method we apply to the Will. But as, in comparing visual and auditory sensations, we see at once that each has developed a unique quality of its own, so when we compare Will with Thought and Feeling, or with the lower conative development, we shall find in it too a unique quality which cannot be analysed into others, or constituted out of them.

And now see how readily this conception, as at least a reasonable hypothesis, interprets that fundamental distinction which is a crucial test of any theory of Will. In involuntary action, we identify ourselves with the frustrated idea, not with the idea accomplished. Both ideas are thought about, of both we foresee certain consequences. Both ideas derive some support from pleasure, pain, desire, or habit. Now which body of thought and tendency is the self of the moment? That only which under the requisite conditions has differentiated as Will. And that idea which is identified with this self is the idea we will to accomplish, and its accomplishment is a voluntary action. But where its accomplishment is impeded by an idea or tendency hostile to it, and which in place of it is accomplished, that result is an involuntary action. Not for all our attention to this idea, not for all the thought and impulse which assimilates or supports it, is the common mind a moment in doubt whether it be one with its Self: but as the Self is utterly alienated from this idea, so when this idea is perforce accomplished it feels an extreme weakness.

Here it is natural to object that we still have not shown what Will is. Can nothing more be said of it than to name it a differentiation of conative thought? And the objection implies that it is further analysable, and again can be reconstituted by combination of its elements. We may analyse the psychosis in which it occurs, and the kind of thought which is inseparable from it, and the idea which is its centre of attachment, and the psychical conditions on which it is dependent; but that differentiation of thought which these conditions provoke, will remain at bottom like a sensation of colour or sound, in respect of its quality unanalysable.

Thus the conclusion reached in the last section receives an indirect support from this. We there inferred that as we could not constitute the event, Will, out of any combination of the

events present in the common conative processes, that probably the quality of this event was unique. Our argument has now been to show that, on our own principles, we should never have assumed that we could constitute it. Our assumption ought to have been precisely contrary. In following the development of thought and conation we should have been on the look-out for any differences in the process which, on the face of them, bore an analogy to the differences of the class-sensations. Then we might perhaps have concluded that Will is but one among many differentiations of our attentive thought, or conation.—From this basis are developed the unique differentiations of Supposal, Question, Judgment, and those modifications which are always found in union with one or other of them—the Categorical, Problematical, and Disjunctive: and from the same basis the unique differentiation of the Imperative.

I will now summarise the principal inferences which are based on the fact of involuntary action, and give some account of their bearings on the theory which is common to most psychologists.

The first is: that which makes an action *involuntary*, as distinguished from one merely *non-voluntary*, is the presence of a volition opposed to it. The second is: this volition is abortive: we will to realise one idea and fail; but we realise a counter-idea which we opposed. The third is: this abortive volition is more than attention to an idea with desire and effort, and contains a distinctive event,—the exclusive identification of ourselves with one idea. The fourth is: this identification is specific, and cannot be resolved into the assimilation of one idea by a body of thought and tendency, which we find in all thought. The fifth is: this identification, this event Will, regarded in its quality or character, is a unique differentiation of conative thought. The sixth is: this event, like all other events, is active, and modifies the psychosis into which it enters.

It will be instructive to compare the second inference with the view held not indeed by all psychologists, but which the most clear-sighted have recognised to be essential to their common theory. This view regards the realisation of the idea as essential to volition. "It is will," says Mr Bradley, "when an idea produces its existence¹." Mere thought is not will: and the question is whether its sequence "has an ideal character, which going before, has thus made its own existence in fact. And, where this is not the case, the process is not will²." Yet we have seen that, in involuntary action, the essential character is that the idea we will to realise does *not* produce its existence.

¹ *Mind*, xiii. p. 25.

² *Ibid.* p. 26.

But here a subtle critic may say: Is it certain that the idea wholly fails to realise itself? if it realise itself, however incompletely, the result is will.

Now when we speak of an involuntary action we are abstracting. We break into the whole process of which that action forms a part, and separate this part. Involuntary action may be but one moment in a process, but, at that moment, volition is abortive, though a moment before or a moment after the same volition to realise the same idea may have been fruitful. In the *Death of Ivan Illitch*, Tolstoi gives a vivid illustration of involuntary action due to terror. The dying man as he sees death approaching him from day to day is struggling to shut out the thought of it. He tries to absorb his attention on reading, playing at cards, conversation; and to artificially resuscitate the many interests which the approach of death has extinguished. But in a little time these objects, one after another, grow transparent, and he sees Death through them looking at him. Then he cannot exclude the idea of it, then he cannot maintain attention to the counter-ideas. At that moment his will is abortive. For he willed to exclude the idea of death; and, so far from excluding it, the idea developed and dominated him. In what degree was the idea of the will realised?—Again, take the volition on the other side. He willed to concentrate attention on an opposite idea; and this idea became transparent, showing Death through it, and at last was, for a time, extinguished. In what degree was the volition realised on this side?—But suppose there are other cases, and that, at times, both the idea of the will and the idea to which it is opposed are in some degree realised. Then there is a mixed voluntary and involuntary result. The idea of death, say, is restrained, it does not quite dominate attention: for with great effort the man keeps a faint and isolated hold of the ideas in a book or in the remarks addressed to him. So much, then, is volition, and consists of an idea in part realised: but what of the involuntary side? Where his action is involuntary, there his volition is abortive. The idea of death is less intense, but still torments him, and he willed to exclude it. At this point, where the voluntary result ends and the involuntary commences, there the volition becomes abortive; and the action *qua* involuntary implies to this extent a wholly abortive volition. Of course this is an abstraction; but involuntary action is an abstraction, and, like other abstractions, makes a smaller and artificial unity out of a larger and more concrete unity.

Now take the more concrete unity. Two opposite ideas are in part realised. Both then are volition: but there cannot be two opposite volitions at the same moment. You must make

a selection, but on what ground can you make it, when both ideas have the identical character which, you say, is a criterion of Will? Thus we are brought round to our old conclusion. It is only because the Self is identified with the one idea and opposed to the other, that the realisation of the one is voluntary and the realisation of the other involuntary. And this identification of the Self we can never explain as any mere process of thought, unless we include in the meaning of thought the differentiation of it we name Will.

Looking generally at this question, it might seem strange how realisation of an idea ever came to be maintained as essential to volition, if we did not remember that without it, on the common theory, the distinction between thought and will is lost. That volitions are often formed to take effect at a future time, and when that time comes are either forgotten or revoked, would seem a common enough experience. These intentions, as we call them, are genuine volitions where they are themselves genuine. James Mill excluded them by a common device. He framed a definition of the will for that purpose:—"The will relates only to immediate acts¹." But had he analysed involuntary action, and not been satisfied with a superficial observation, that absence of desire constituted it involuntary, he would have found in it a volition relating "to immediate acts," yet not in his sense a volition, inasmuch as it failed to realise these acts. He would then, on his own principles, have been bound to class it as motive and desire²; and, as consequence, either to deny that the action realised in spite of this motive was involuntary, inasmuch as a motive only and no volition opposed it; or admitting that the presence of this opposing motive constituted the action involuntary, he would have been compelled to draw the equally absurd inference that all complex volition is involuntary, since here too an action is realised in spite of an opposing motive.

The sixth inference is a very obvious one, and can arouse no opposition where it is rightly understood. Wherever a new event occurs in a mental process, we may infer that it modifies the psychosis into which it enters, not merely by the bare fact of its entrance, but by some change which it tends to set up among the constituents of that psychosis. In every science, we make an analogous assumption: no event, however insignificant, is without some influence on the objects or events connected with it. If we mean no more than this in calling the will 'active' or an 'activity,' the statement may pass. But a more important question is, what is the character of its activity,—

¹ *Analysis of the Human Mind*, vol. ii. p. 398.

² *Ibid.* p. 353.

what change does it tend to produce in a psychosis? We hold that all co-presented events strengthen or weaken one another, according as they can be taken up into the same system of thought, or are incompatible. And as, in involuntary action, the will is combined with one idea, and in opposition to another, it seems reasonable to infer that it strengthens the first, as it weakens the second. But in what respect are the ideas strengthened or weakened? An idea may have, at a given moment, a strong tendency to evoke other ideas with which it has been experienced; or on the other hand, to realise the object which we take it to represent. And our question is whether the will strengthens not the first and general tendency, but the second, specific, tendency. Certainly, many ideas are realised in the world which without a will and a strong will to realise them would not be. But such a volition may be variously interpreted. Does the will, not in a loose and popular sense, but as precisely the differentiation of thought which we have found it to be, strengthen the movement of an idea to its realisation? That realisation may be ordinarily explained as due to the activity of the idea, to pleasure, pain and desire, to attention and the system of thought supporting the idea: but at least will, if it occur, should co-operate. It cannot be an impotent spectator, for even thought is not that. It must be an agent; or we should have to give it an altogether exceptional position among mental events. But if it act, what action is so obviously its own as its tendency to realise the idea which it also wills to realise.

We soon learn to distinguish between ideas which, when they occur, maintain themselves with prolific development, and ideas which attract the attention for a moment, and then, as Prof. James expresses it, "go out." The first do not require the will for their support: the second, if they are to be maintained must be voluntarily arrested. What is the nature of this arrest? Is it attention? Attention may be already present to this idea, and see and foresee its rapid effacement. Then, neither the strength of the idea, nor our attention saves it from extinction. But our attention yields always a clear awareness of the fact; and so a new idea is suggested of saving the first idea. Does this idea save it? Sometimes no doubt. It may have a strength which the first has not, and its realisation be the outcome. At others, it cannot; and what happened to the first idea may happen to it. Through attention we may be aware of its rapid disappearance. But if, notwithstanding, it do not disappear. If we experience a new change in ourselves, in our attitude to the idea, which we name Will, and with it the arrest of the idea, then we can ascribe this arrest neither to the

idea nor to attention, but only to the new event of the occurrence of will.

There is a last inference which we shall accept with great reluctance. Though many practical people have a strong conviction that the will does not always follow the strongest present motive, psychologists have felt that in order to give any scientific account of the will, they must assume that it always does. What explanation can be given of a will that sometimes yields to, sometimes thwarts the stronger of two competing tendencies? A moral or metaphysical explanation might be forthcoming, but could a psychological one be found? But we are here concerned, not with an explanation, but a fact: and the brilliant description which Prof. James has given of it shows that, in appearance, at least, it is not in agreement with our assumption. In all "hard cases of volition," he says, wherever "effort" complicates the process, we feel "as if the line taken when the rarer and more ideal motives prevail, were the line of greater resistance, and as if the line of coarser motivation were the more previous and easy one, even at the very moment when we refuse to follow it." Yet he has not ventured to express more than this surmise. Those moral resolutions which he has taken as examples are indeed so ambiguous, and have been interpreted from such opposite points of view, that it seems impossible to base any certain conclusions on them. Though it is an assured fact that we sometimes act contrary to the desire which, if not the strongest, is certainly the most intense, and sometimes in favour of an alternative which may be desirable, but for which we feel no actual desire, it does not follow that the idea of this is on the whole weaker as a motive to action. Subtle threads of association and habit, which cannot be felt and can only be judged of by their result, may connect this idea with the action which accomplishes it; and while the painful effort we feel expresses our thwarted desire, it may be no indication of the relative strength of the competing motives.

Thus we are left with opposite explanations of the same fact which alternately appeal to opposite sides of our nature. But, in involuntary action, we have no mere surmise that the will sometimes follows the weaker motive, but evidence apparently so strong that we can draw only one conclusion from it.

If, where there are two conflicting ideas present and one is realised, the idea with the strongest tendency to action necessarily engaged the will, then, in involuntary action, the idea realised we must also will to realise. The will cannot be in

¹ *Op. cit.* vol. ii. p. 548.

alliance with the frustrated idea, because its defeat has proved it to be the weaker. Consequently there can be no such fact as involuntary action. But if there is such a fact, then the will supports the weaker and frustrated idea. Now an idea regarded as a "tendency to action is properly denominated Motive¹"; and the strongest present motive is the idea with the strongest, present tendency to action. Consequently we are expressing in another way the same conclusion in saying: If there is such a fact as involuntary action, there the strongest motive is realised, but the weaker motive is willed.

IV.

There is a class of involuntary actions to which I have made no reference in the preceding account, because of their little interest for Psychology. They are those in which an external circumstance realises an idea in opposition to the will without that idea playing any part in its own realisation. To these cases, the various conclusions reached have no application, except that here, too, the will is abortive through the realisation of an idea or tendency opposed to it: and this may be taken as the common character of all involuntary actions in the strict sense. Popular usage, indeed, includes, in the meaning of the word, actions which have never been anticipated in idea, as reflex actions; or as when we make some slip or mistake, and so fail in what we had intended; or where we strike someone accidentally. But these actions are strictly speaking non-purposive, or non-voluntary, not involuntary; because we had no antecedent idea of them, and therefore the will could not act against this idea. But here the will does oppose an idea which some external circumstance realises. Suppose that a doctor kills in endeavouring to cure his patient. He may have thought of this event as just possible through the action of the drug prescribed. Yet it was not the idea of this event which worked its own accomplishment, but its accomplishment occurred disconnectedly, and through the operation of causes in which the idea had no place. Still the accident is involuntary on the doctor's part, because it is the realisation of an idea in opposition to the idea of the Will.

Thus the assumption we make so readily, that where two ideas are in conflict and one is realised, that realised must be the stronger, is not universally true: the stronger idea may meet with some obstacle in external circumstance, and the

¹ James Mill. *Op. cit.* vol. ii.

weaker with an event favourable to it. But if realisation is no conclusive test of the superior strength of an idea, what other test have we; and how can we be sure that, in other cases of involuntary action, the idea opposed to the will is the strongest motive? We must answer that, in all other cases, we cannot explain the fact except on this assumption. How, otherwise, is it possible, when a man is possessed by some anxiety, that he often cannot attend to any idea opposed to it. He reads words on a page or listens to words spoken, but time after time their meaning escapes him. His volition to attend to them is sometimes abortive: and there is no explanation of this fact, unless we assume that this pressing anxiety, through its dominance as motive, extinguishes all ideas opposed to its systematic associations. In pathological cases, where a fixed idea is present, we can only explain the failure of the will by the abnormal strength of the idea. And the case of physical pain is familiar to all of us. When not too intense, we can forget it for a time, and direct our thoughts elsewhere. But if its growing intensity pass a limit, it compels attention, and extinguishes all thought apart from it. Still it may be said the persistence of the painful sensation and its associations is not due to the idea that we have of its persistence, nor is the idea of the will to forget it or shut it out of the area of attention rendered abortive through this idea, but through the fact of its persistence, as dependent on conditions among which the idea has little influence. And this is true; but notwithstanding the will is supporting the weaker motive although the motive opposed to it is no idea. The painful sensation shows greater strength in holding the attention and developing its own ideas, than the ideas supported by the will. And when these are extinguished and the sensation engrosses us, the involuntary action can only be explained as due to its superior strength. Thus we can only explain the common varieties of involuntary attention and action on the assumption that the motive which the will supports is weaker than the motive it opposes,—even when the force of the will is added to the weaker.

There are two other means at our disposal for estimating the present strength of opposite motives. We may take first the theory of Prof. James that the "states of mind which normally possess the most impulsive quality are either those which represent objects of passion, appetite, or emotion...; or they are feelings or ideas of pleasure or pain; or ideas which for any reason we have grown accustomed to obey...." "Compared with these various objects all far-off considerations, all highly abstract conceptions, unaccustomed reasonings, and motives foreign to the instinctive history of the race, have little

or no impulsive power. They prevail, when they do prevail, *with effort...*¹ But as, in any particular case, we cannot be sure that the strength of some propensity is not balanced by the habit of obeying some abstract idea, if we are to make any practical use of the theory, we must rely on the feeling of effort which complicates all "hard cases of volition." Yet if we suppose that the feeling of effort is an indication that the will is reinforcing the weaker motive, we see at once that there are cases to which the supposition cannot apply. We cannot argue that where we have the alternatives present of descending a mountain or climbing to its summit, or the choice between a drive and a walk, and select the latter, that the greater effort felt is an indication that the will has selected the weaker motive. Thus we are brought to the distinction of Prof. James between effort of will and "the *muscular* effort with which it is usually confounded"; and to confining our supposition to the first variety. But can the distinction be maintained on these lines? If we hold that all other effort is muscular, it is hard to establish effort of will as an exception. Effort of will would arise, at least in part, from the process of attention which volition involves, and be the inward expression of the motor processes connected with it: and it seems reasonable to suppose that, taken as mere muscular effort, it would become more intense, not merely in proportion to the resistance or inertia of the idea attended to, but also in proportion to the strength of the competing idea present. Without then supposing a difference of kind can we in some other way distinguish them? The commoner muscular effort may be due to reflex action, or to a conative process which is not specifically will. The other is specifically a voluntary effort; and is due, not to the outward accomplishment of a volition, but to the inward making of it. It comes as the immediate and not the subsequent effect of will; and we experience it, at least we only distinctly experience it, where we seem to thwart the stronger motive. For if, after struggling with passion, we yield, the feeling of effort which had been painfully conspicuous disappears. The metaphors which poets use to describe this state are taken from movements which are almost effortless, such as 'sliding,' 'slipping.'

"On roses red I seemed to slip."

"She gave me a cup of the gods to sip."

"I kissed the rubies of her lip."

If then we can distinguish, as we can in many cases, the effort felt immediately in our volitions, as internal processes, from the effort felt in their external realisation, then we may

¹ *Op. cit.* vol. ii. p. 536. See also pp. 548—9.

say volitional effort occurs whenever the will interferes with, what might be called, the natural supremacy of the strongest motive.

And as the effort felt in supporting an object in the hand is a rough measure of the relative weight of the object, so, we might say, the degree of volitional effort is a rough measure of the relative strength of the motive which the will opposes.

But, in this inference, we overlook a feeling of effort arising from three different sources which is immediately felt in volitions, and yet cannot be explained as due to the competition of a stronger motive. In the first place if, where the weaker of two competing ideas is selected, that must occasion a feeling of effort, then, where the two ideas are equal in strength, that will probably occasion some feeling of effort, whichever be selected. In fact we may go farther and infer that, wherever two ideas are present and one is selected, the rejected idea, however weak, will tend to arouse a feeling of effort in inverse proportion to its weakness. Thus it will be only at some point in the growing intensity of the feeling that we can infer the presence of an opposite idea of superior strength; and it will be difficult to fix this point.

In the second place, all attention tends to arouse some feeling of effort as the subjective expression of the motor processes which it stimulates: and as we may have attention without volition, but no volition without it, so some degree of volitional effort must be discounted as due to the mere presence of attention. But while our non-voluntary attention occasions a sensation of effort so faint that it is either inappreciable, or can only be appreciated by the psychological expert, in all "hard cases" of voluntary attention, it is so intense that it can be appreciated by everyone.

Lastly, there is a feeling of effort which is immediate and yet cannot be referred to the competition of an alternative idea of action. A common example occurs in voluntary recollection. We may be trying to recollect a name; and the idea of recollecting it from which we start may not be complicated by an idea of any alternative direction of our thoughts. Yet, the attempt to make the idea instrumental in evoking the name may occasion a considerable feeling of effort. This case shows that volitional effort may be partly due to the inertia of an idea, as well as to the competition of a counter-idea. Nor can we often assign the amount of effort which must be assigned to the one cause or to the other; for in will proper, or complex volition, they both operate together. On the whole, we must conclude that the inferences we make as to the relative strength

of our ideas as motives, if based on the feeling of effort, are mostly uncritical and without scientific value. Yet, notwithstanding, there are cases familiar to most of us, where the idea is so easy of accomplishment, so habitually performed, and occasioning, in normal states of mind, no appreciable degree of effort, that the intense effort sometimes felt, where there is a counter-idea present, may be reasonably inferred as due mainly to its superior strength. All language expressing the common experience of men, has incarnated these great differences in the degree of the feeling. If we find that such metaphors as 'struggling,' 'fighting,' are commonly applied when we oppose passion, but seldom or never when we oppose duty; if opposite metaphors like 'falling,' 'sliding,' 'slipping,' express our feeling when we side with the one, but never when we stand by the other; then we may reasonably infer that the great difference of feeling is mainly to be attributed to a great difference in the relative strength of the motives, and to whether the will yields to or resists the natural supremacy of the strongest.

We may sometimes employ a second means of estimating the present strength of conflicting ideas and motives. We include in their total strength a strength derived from many sources, from the ideas or sensations that support them, from habit, from pleasure, pain, desire, and attention. But as we have to consider their relative strength before the will reinforces one of them, we must exclude its influence.

We have seen that an idea may be strong in one respect and weak in another. It may show a strong tendency to develop a train of ideas or reverie in harmony with itself, but no perceptible tendency, at the moment, to pass into outward act. But its strength in every respect is expressed in its self-maintenance or development, as its positive weakness, in every respect, is expressed in the tendency, as Prof. James calls it, to "go out." Now if we find that one idea, either maintains itself in full, or, while losing what is accidental, becomes the coordinating centre of a train of ideas or images with the same general character, while another opposed to it appears, arrests the attention for a moment, and is then obscured and extinguished, then, it is quite clear, that the first idea has a stronger tendency to develop in this direction than the second has to develop in any. And as an idea regarded as a tendency to produce some result is properly denominated a 'motive' in respect of that result, so the first idea is a stronger motive in that respect than the second is in any.

Now it is this kind of conflict we so often witness in our internal volitions. We recognise that one idea is strong, as

evidenced by its development, while another idea in opposition to it catches the attention for a moment and is then obscured. But if while it is slipping from us, a volition arises directed to its maintenance and to the extrusion of the idea which, so far from disappearing is throwing out new schools of development, then, in this volition, we have conclusive evidence that the will is supporting the weaker motive.

The argument so commonly urged that the relative strength of motives is only shown by the realisation of one of them, overlooks this intermediate stage of development or decay. Therefore it can recognise no scientific test of the strength of a motive in the stage antecedent to its realisation. It fails to observe the continuity of the process. Between the presence of an idea and its extinction, is no gap, but the process, more or less elusive, of its obscuration. Between the presence of an idea and its realisation, is again the process, more or less elusive, of its development,—in external volition, the tension of the muscles which precedes their contraction, in internal, the new ideas of identical character which are beginning to manifest themselves.