

Educating the Will

Part I

Spirit Will and Ethical Individuality

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The education and teaching of the future will have to set particular value on the development of the will and feeling nature....Feeling and will are left more and more to what is called chance, because there is no insight into the real nature of will.

Rudolf Steiner, *The Foundations of Human Experience*, Lecture 4

The Need For Insight Into Will

If our intent as teachers and parents is to develop our children's full human potential, we will want to educate their feeling and will with as much insight and care as we bring to the development of their thinking. If we recognize that in this regard our insight is inadequate then our task is clear—we must seek every means to cultivate deeper insight into the nature and development of feeling and will.

Will is often equated with action, with moving our limbs. If educating the will is simply a matter of exercising our limbs, then physical exercise will suffice. Regular opportunities for exercise are essential to healthy development, but developing our will is more than exercising our limbs. With our limbs we engage in outer activity; behind the outer activity there is the inner activity of thoughts, feelings, desires, and motives. Will belongs to the inner activity behind the outer activity. Will is the inner force behind the outer force of our limbs.

Perceiving Will

We readily perceive outer actions, deeds, and effects, both our own and those of others. Do we perceive will? Can we perceive inner activity as clearly and as consciously as outer activity? To educate the will based on true insight, requires that we develop the capacity to perceive will as inner reality. Where can we see will?

When we learn a new capacity, such as riding a bike, driving a car, using a new computer program, or when we try to change a habit such as smoking, drinking coffee, or to be more patient and tolerant, we are challenged to make an inner effort. The more difficult the challenge, the more we feel the intensity of this inner effort. When we observe this inner effort, we are no longer observing outer reality but an inner reality.

How this inner force translates into outer deeds remains largely unconscious. We have a thought, an intention; we move our hands and legs, but how a thought or feeling moves our muscles and limbs is mostly outside our waking consciousness. Science can describe some of the physiological and

biochemical processes that go on in our body, but we are no more conscious of these processes as they occur than we are of the processes that make our car work while we drive it. We are aware of our inner effort, which typically is greater when we are learning a new capacity and less intense as we master it. Wherever we perceive inner effort, in whatever context, we are perceiving will.

As a teacher of sculpture, I have some students who approach clay modeling with great exuberance and self-assurance. Some of these energetic students produce beautiful, well-formed sculptures. Others, however, will push and pull the clay with gusto and yet never create clearly-articulated forms. In contrast, there are other students who are quite reserved and cautious. Some of these inhibited students, even when given detailed instructions, make sculptures that are tentative and weak. And yet, it is often one of the reserved students who surprises everyone—including themselves—by producing one of the finer sculptures in the class.

How do such observations help me serve my students in developing their will? Are exuberance and energy expressions of a strong and healthy will? Are passivity and inhibition signs of a weak will? What does the capacity to create well-articulated forms have to do with the will? Does a strong forming capacity reflect a strong will and a weak forming capacity a weak will?

To all this we must add the question of the student's effort. A student could work with great energy and produce a well-formed sculpture but have exercised a minimum of effort. Such a student may be gifted, but in this instance her will is not particularly active. Another equally energetic student might not produce as well-formed a sculpture, but if she makes every effort to overcome a tendency to formlessness, in that sense her will is engaged and thus strengthened.

And what are we to make of the inhibited student who produces formless sculptures? Such a student could easily be misjudged as lacking will on two counts. Although a student may appear blocked and produce weak work, he could be making a significant inner effort. Someone with significant inner and outer obstacles to overcome, typically must exercise greater effort which in turn, develops a stronger will. That inner effort of will may not show immediately in outer results. For this reason, we must be cautious about judging inner effort and strength of will based on outer appearance and results alone. We must allow for a certain law of inner development: the time it takes for effort of will to bear fruit in outer results is outside human control—that of the individual, parents, teachers. We must make the effort, but the results are in God's time.

We may think we are able to assess when others are exerting inner effort, and perhaps some of the time we can. But the more we realize how little we consciously perceive our own will, let alone the will of someone else, the more cautious and modest we might feel about our capacity to assess and educate the will. Some parents and teachers will feel necessity requires that they do the best they can with whatever capacities they have. Others may feel overwhelmed by such responsibility and shy away from making judgments for fear of misjudging. In both cases, we have every reason to strive to perceive will with ever-growing clarity.

Willed Thinking

As parents and teachers we want to be able to perceive the developing will of our children. Towards this end, we will begin by learning to observe will more clearly in ourselves. We will not do this in

the context of outer action, as we might expect, but in the activity of thinking. For example, choose a simple object such as a pencil, knife, or spoon and for a few minutes develop a train of thought that is exclusively related to that object. The person who can stay focused on the object for more than a few seconds without wandering off into unrelated thoughts and feelings is rare. In everyday life, we may think we are in control of our thoughts, but this simple exercise challenges this assumption. The significance of this thinking exercise became clearer for me when I recalled a group of kayakers I once saw paddling a rushing stream.

The kayakers were strong and expert paddlers. As they paddled downstream they displayed incredible mastery, going wherever and however they fancied. There seemed to be no limit to what they could do, including paddling directly upstream against the raging torrent. I was captivated as I watched some of them move slowly upstream—10, 20, 30 feet. Incredibly, some could paddle as much as 100 feet against the current, but sooner or later, even the strongest and most skillful paddlers would run out of steam. Instantly they would be swept back downstream by the relentless force of the current.

The skill of these kayakers can be compared to the skill of a good thinker who maneuvers confidently in the realm of thought. Just as there is downstream and upstream paddling, we can speak of downstream and upstream thinking. Like a novice kayaker who splashes about ineffectively, someone who flounders about in the sphere of thinking will be swept downstream by the stream of thinking. A logical thinker, by comparison, exhibits great mastery in moving freely and effortlessly within the stream of thought. However, logical thinking is carried on the stream of logical necessity. A logical thinker is therefore like a kayaker who has mastered going downstream. In this sense, logical thinking is downstream thinking.

Only thinkers who cultivate the inner will to build thought upon thought without being swept along by random thoughts or automatic logic can be compared to the kayaker who is able to paddle upstream. The ability to develop even a simple train of thought without any compelling factors, if only for a few moments, is to think upstream. Otherwise, thinking streams through us from morning to night, largely beyond our awareness and control. When we try to build our own train of thought we discover that we are inwardly quite feeble relative to the strength of the stream of thought that otherwise flows through us. The so-called freedom of thought we exercise in daily life is actually the freedom of going with the stream of thinking. Thinking, as we commonly know it, is unfree thinking, because we are compelled to go with the stream that flits arbitrarily from thought to thought or is bound by logical necessity. To resist the compelling force of both of these forms of downstream thinking requires inner strength of will. Free thinking is willed thinking.

By doing a simple exercise such as developing a train of thought about an object, we perceive the activity of will and see how it can be developed in us through the transformation of unfree thinking into ever more free thinking. The line between free and unfree thinking is not hard and fast. In fact, the process of developing will in thinking actually begins with logical thinking in the same way that downstream paddling is a step towards upstream paddling.

Thinking Will

We can observe another dimension of will through a different exercise. In this case, we perform a

simple outer action that serves no practical need or purpose. For example, we move an object from one position to another. We do this not once but daily for an extended period of time, at least a month. Our will is engaged in carrying out this deed, but the will involved in activating our limbs is minimal. The real challenge of this exercise lies in finding the will to remember every day to do this simple act when there is no need or purpose compelling us to do it. Insofar as we are driven in our actions by a need or desire, we are unfree in our will. Conversely, only when we are not compelled by any outer or inner need can we claim to act with free will. Every time we fail to do this exercise or any deed we are not compelled to do, reveals to us that free will is neither an easy or common matter. We discover that our impulses to action are also a stream that flows through us. We feel free to paddle this way or that, but we are unaware that our choices are almost always with, rather than against, an unconscious stream of will.

Freedom of choice is not the same as freedom of will. Insofar as will is an unconscious force sweeping us into action, we are inherently unfree. We become free in our will only when we take hold of our will impulses through our thinking, raising unconscious impulses to conscious motives. The will exercise described above challenges us to think the deed anew each day. We must develop the will to do it, but more importantly, we must develop the will to think it. Thinking the deed enables us to do it, and also to know why we do it. To know our motivation for action is to counter the unconscious and therefore unfree dimension of our will. Will must be permeated by thinking to be free will. Free will is thinking will.

Free Will

We may go where we will, say what we will, and do what we will. Outwardly, we may appear, even to ourselves, to exercise free will. As long as no external agent obstructs our will, we are blessed with outer freedom. Outer freedom is a gift that can never be taken for granted. However, outer freedom is not inner freedom. When compelled from outside ourselves, we are physically unfree. Similarly, when compelled from within, we are inwardly or spiritually unfree. Outer freedom belongs to the dignity of every human being, but it is incomplete without the complimentary development of inner freedom. If we are inwardly unfree when exercising outer freedom, our outer freedom is largely an illusion that works against our well-being. So much has been achieved in the last centuries regarding outer freedom. An equally great and arduous frontier lies before mankind to grasp the nature and significance of inner freedom. All the efforts and accomplishments to win outer freedom will bear fruit only to the degree that humankind gives equal effort through education and other means to the development of inner freedom. The mysteries and challenges posed by human will are at the center of this new cultural frontier where we encounter the need to find practical answers to the questions: What is free will? When are we unfree in our will? How can we develop free will? To educate the will means to develop free will.

Observing the “I”

We have observed our own will as the inner effort to resist the compelling forces in our thinking. We have seen that freedom in our thinking depends on exercising will in thinking. In order to observe our will activity we had to exercise it. Thus, observing our will became synonymous with

developing our will. Likewise, we have observed another side of will as the unconscious and therefore compelling force behind our every day actions. We have seen that inner freedom in our will calls for self-directed thinking.

If we are attentive in these thinking and willing exercises, we will make an additional observation. When trying to exercise free thinking we can observe our “I” initiating the inner effort of will to direct our thinking. Likewise, when trying to cultivate freedom in willing we can observe our “I” thinking the thought that initiates our action. Cultivating inner freedom in both our thinking and willing provide opportunities to observe our “I” as the agent actively determining which thoughts and will impulses will live in and through us. No matter how fleeting our success to master our thinking or willing, we can feel the very effort as a strengthening of our will. If only for a few seconds, we can feel this enhancement of will as an enhanced sense of “I.” We feel our “I” is stronger. This experience begs the question: what is the relationship between a strong will and a strong “I?” In order to come to a full picture of the will, in particular free will, we must clarify what we mean by a strong “I,” a strong individual. Toward this end we will also need to clarify the difference between a strong individual and a strong personality.

Typically a strong personality has a strong will, overflowing with energy to get things done. Such a strong personality reveals strong individuality if and when she is not driven and therefore is free in her will. Weak individuality manifests even in a strong-willed personality who is unable to master her will and thus is inwardly unfree. Similarly, someone who appears to have a weak will, and in that sense might be regarded as a weak personality, would exhibit strong individuality when he makes the inner effort to overcome any inherent lack of energy and initiative.

The capacity described above, to win a degree of freedom in our will through thinking, enables us to tame an over-active will or to stimulate an under-active will. Whether we have a strong or weak personality, a strong or weak bodily constitution is, in the first instance, something outside our control. However, it is our individuality, our “I,” that chooses to passively resign us to our given constitution and personality or to become inwardly active in transforming and extending our original limitations. All efforts to transform and balance our given bodily and soul constitution, however modestly and slowly, are deeds of our “I,” our individuality. In fact, our individuality develops through such inner striving.

If our intention as parents and teachers is to develop the whole human being, the whole child, then we must provide every opportunity for children to develop their thinking, feeling and will nature. Equally, we must do all we can to nurture the potential of their “I” to take hold of their bodily and soul constitution. We must guide children to unfold the full potentials, not only of their body and soul, but also of their spirit individuality. Every child is a unique individual who should be given every opportunity to develop her full individuality. If such thoughts are to be more than rhetoric or good intentions of parents, educators, or public officials, then we must recognize the need to be more rigorous in our understanding of individuality and the ways it is developed. This essay attempts to clarify the nature and development of will in order to understand better the nature and development of individuality.

Different Forms of Will

From the above discussion, at least three different forms of will can be recognized. We have indicated that a strong or weak individuality or “I” is quite distinct from a strong or weak personality, which is different again from a strong or weak bodily constitution. In the descriptions of my sculpture students we saw that some are blessed with an abundance of energy while others have less. This energy is will at the level of the physical/etheric constitution, which we will refer to as “life will.” The degree to which someone creates well-formed sculptures depends on an ability to integrate thinking, feeling and willing. A student may be able to picture a form but be unable to master the movements of her hands to make the form visible in the clay. Another student may be quite capable with his hands but may have difficulty visualizing the form in his mind’s eye. In both cases we are looking at will within the soul or astral body. We will speak of will at this level as “soul will.” Lastly, the degree of effort a person makes, particularly in overcoming the limitations of his bodily and soul constitution, originates from the will of the “I” or the “spirit will.” If we are to educate the will, we must be clear about which form of will we are educating. In fact, we must clarify how these different forms of will are intrinsically related to each other.

“I”	individuality	spirit will
astral body	personality	soul will
etheric/physical	bodily constitution	life will

Such distinctions could seem to make our understanding of will more confusing by making it more complicated. Equal to the danger of making a simple thing unnecessarily complicated is the risk of making a complex reality too simple. I submit that the latter is the case with our common understanding of will. Much confusion and misunderstanding about the will originates from the fact that we use the word “will” to cover a broad spectrum of reality. Imagine if we had only the word ‘color’ and no names for the individual colors such as red, yellow and blue. The Eskimos have many different words for snow because their survival depends on their ability to be clear about the subtle but significant variations in snow. Similarly, our welfare may depend on our ability to distinguish subtle but significant differences in the forms of will.

We have differentiated three kinds of will that correspond to the three-fold human being of body, soul and spirit. In Lecture 4 of *The Foundations of Human Experience*, Rudolf Steiner elaborated no fewer than seven different forms of will that correspond with the seven-fold human being:

- physical body.....instinct
- etheric body.....impulse/drive
- astral bodydesire
- ego.....motive
- spirit self.....wish
- life spirit.....intention
- spirit man.....resolve

In Part III of this article, we will see the significance of all seven forms of will, in particular, the three higher forms. For now we will elaborate further our understanding of the three forms of will

we have named, life will, soul will and spirit will. The reader will note that for the sake of simplicity we have combined the physical and etheric thus reducing the four levels to three. In itself, such a list of terms is abstract, making it difficult for us to feel an inner connection and sense of relevance. To counter this one-sidedness we will try to bring to life these distinctions about will through a picture. We will imagine a charioteer riding his chariot with the reins to his horse firmly in hand. We will compare the will of the horse to the will of the charioteer. The charioteer could reach his destination without using his horse—he could walk or he could pull his chariot himself. In this case the charioteer would exert the strength of his own limbs, he would exercise his own life will instead of using the life will of his horse. Perhaps the charioteer lacks the necessary strength or perhaps he simply wants to arrive at his destination more quickly and without exhausting his own life will.

The charioteer's desire to go to a particular place in a particular manner is an expression of his soul will, the will of his astral body. The horse may also have a will of its own. The horse may have lots of vitality, a strong life will, but may display a stubborn will to go nowhere or a wild will to go everywhere except where the charioteer intends. This "will-of-its-own" exhibited by the horse is not its life will, but its soul will. A stubborn or wild horse has a strong soul will of its own that may be in complete opposition to the equally strong but different soul will of the charioteer. In a contest between soul will and soul will, the charioteer has no particular advantage over the horse. The charioteer has an advantage only in his potential to master the soul and life will of the horse through exercising his spirit will. The potential advantage of the charioteer lies not simply in his power of thought which the horse also possesses—both the charioteer and the horse have an astral body—but in his potential to observe, learn from and alter his thinking through the activity of his spirit will or "I."

The spirit will of our "I" is the charioteer. Thinking, feeling and willing are the three steeds of our soul that our "I" as charioteer must master or be mastered by them. Some of us have horses with a wild will, others with a stubborn will, and others have some combination of wild and stubborn, swinging back and forth without warning. Whatever the horse, the task of the charioteer is to master the soul and life will of his horse(s). Whether we have a body with an excess or deficit of vitality, or whether we have a strong or weak personality, the challenge for our spirit will is the same—to master the life will and soul will that destiny has given us.

In summary, we can say that the charioteer exerts his life will when he makes a physical effort. He exerts his soul will when he makes an inner effort in thinking, feeling and willing such as when directing his outer actions through thinking and feeling. Most importantly, the charioteer, unlike the horse, can learn from past experience and change the way he thinks and acts through self-initiated activity. The charioteer exercises his spirit will only when his inner effort is directed towards developing new capacities and/or balancing one-sided tendencies in his bodily or soul constitution.

Soul will and spirit will both involve inner effort compared with the outer effort of life will. For this reason soul will and spirit will are often confused. The primary characteristic of spirit will is that the inner effort is self-initiated. For example, soul will is exercised in learning to play a musical instrument. Spirit will is engaged only when the individual makes that effort out of themselves and not because a parent or teacher is making them do it. For this reason human freedom exists only when we exercise our spirit will. In our life will and soul will we make choices and we make effort,

but those choices and effort are done in freedom only when they are initiated by our spirit will, our true individuality. Conversely, we know and develop our authentic individuality only when we exercise the inner freedom of our spirit will.

The thought that every outer and inner challenge is an opportunity to develop our spirit will, our spirit individuality, by transforming the unfree elements of our life and soul will gives meaning and purpose to life. Our life will and soul will may be strong or weak, however the spirit will of our individuality is never too strong—in every case our individuality, as distinct from our personality, can be strengthened. The unfree elements of our bodily and soul nature serve a higher good; they provide the substance upon which our spirit individuality works. In so doing our spirit individuality is challenged to exercise spirit will. In cultivating spirit will we develop our true individuality.

Part II of this three-part article will take up the practical methods by which will is developed through the different disciplines of the curriculum. Part III will look at the will development of teachers and parents in the light of our own children's development but also in relation to the long-term evolution of education and social life.

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