

## Will is the Ability of a Person to Consciously Manage their Behavior

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### ABSTRACT

Will refers to a person's capacity to intentionally control their actions in pursuit of a specific objective. Achieving a goal can sometimes take an entire lifetime. The challenges encountered while pursuing a goal may be small, but they can also demand extraordinary efforts. This is where willpower becomes essential, representing the aspect of a person's mental life that shows through deliberate and focused actions, closely tied to the exertion of will aimed at reaching the established goals.

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### Introduction

We are approaching from various paths and different distances [1]. One of us navigates through the city, dealing with traffic along the route. The other is traveling from rural areas, facing long and winding roads. The weather is the same for both of us, possibly sunny or with an unexpected thunderstorm. One person drives an older car, bought for a reasonable price, nothing special but it runs well. The other is in a newer model, with climate control and a sound system that connects instantly. Maybe a deer jumps out in front of one of us, while the other might need to stop at a toll booth. In the end, we arrive at our scheduled time and location.

Most aspects of our ride were varied and mostly outside of our control. However, the final destination was not affected by these factors. We could argue that one of us had a more pleasant or easier experience, but ultimately, the destination remains unchanged regardless of that. We both arrived at where we intended because we each guided our vehicles to that point.

This autonomy embodies the essence of will. Just as a captain navigates a ship through

uncontrollable circumstances, willpower assists us, giving us guidance in waters beyond our influence. Recognizing our values might help determine our direction, but it is will that propels us forward.

### Starting Point

During a psychiatric evaluation for diagnosis, an individual's initial clinical "surface" becomes visible [2]. Different fields aim to look "beneath" this surface: through technical means like brain scans or lab tests analyzing bodily fluids, as well as through psychoanalytic assessments and behavioral therapy observations. The following discussion will assert that the descriptive-psychopathological method serves as a foundation for deeper investigations, enabling a look beneath the external appearances. This approach deals with disruptions in neuroscientific functional systems that contribute to mental symptoms. Such systems can be impaired due to various illnesses, be it emotional responses to surroundings or the activation of genetically influenced conditions or other pathological mechanisms.

An unacceptable simplification of pathological experiences to basic neuroscientific principles

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is not the goal here. Neuroscience fails to fully account for the intricate and varied nature of personal experiences. For every person who endures them, there exists an array of distinct syndromes. Each one is unique. Researchers encounter these diverse experiences among individuals and aim to understand them, showing compassion for the specific anguish of each person. However, clinicians must then align the patient's experiences with broader psychopathological classifications intended to categorize such experiences. The neuroscientific insights regarding psychopathology do not address the variety of individual experiences, but instead relate to clinically validated dimensions and categories for describing pathological states.

In examining will from a mental health perspective, certain terms help clarify what we mean [1]. Defining these words serves as a solid foundation. Volition is described as the "sequence of choices concerning whether to take action, which action to take, and the timing of that action." Self-efficacy relates to the feeling of being capable of taking action. Agency is the sensation that accompanies the execution of a planned action. Intention represents a consciously crafted statement that aims to influence behavior. Will involves the voluntary engagement and experience of all these elements.

The idea of will, especially in psychology and neuroscience, is quite intricate. Will is a deliberate control mechanism that is initiated intentionally. Will as an asset does not define you like a characteristic trait. Instead, it's a skill inherent in every person to regulate oneself. It's important to view it as an ability or skill to cultivate rather than a trait one may possess or lack.

## Humans

It is vital to regard our will as a human ability to prepare ourselves for practical use [1]. Despite considering it as an ability, from a neurological viewpoint, will is not a force completely under your control. You cannot freely oversee every action you take at every moment of your life. Humans experience a flexible decision-making process, where part of it falls within our control. For mental well-being, it is crucial not to exaggerate or downplay our mastery over will.

Will serves as a resource of ability, impacting both short-term and long-term mental health. As we shall see, while we have a limited degree of control over our actions, the influence we possess within that range of freedom is distinctive, powerful, essential, and invaluable.

An essential aspect of will as a resource is the level of control within our abilities. Currently, there are significant debates about whether humans truly possess free will. These conversations occur in areas such as psychology, neuroscience, behavior, law, philosophy, and religion. Do we actually direct our own actions, or are we shaped by our genes, experiences, situations, and surroundings? And to what extent? Much of the research points to a gray area. Humans are not merely predictable outcomes of life's variables. People do not solely determine their results through willpower and determination. Between these two extremes lies our potential: to channel our energy towards the control and influence we have to shape our lives and enhance

our environment. Even small contributions of willpower are very important.

The perspective and faith we carry regarding will are practically significant. If we believe that our efforts to change do not count, we are unlikely to try sincerely. It's beneficial to reflect on whether you think your efforts are meaningful. Will is a natural mental capability that can be cultivated, improved, and utilized.

Will involves more than just wanting, although desire can be a part of it [3]. Will is set apart from instinct and reflex since it can go against urges and align with our values, motivations, and principles. The transition does not move from chaos to total control. Instead, it progresses from being preoccupied, resigned, or feeling powerless to having a will that is intentionally focused.

The belief in free will relies on the ability to tell right from wrong and the power to control one's actions. Mental health issues that affect either this understanding or control can impact free will, lowering or removing accountability, but these conditions must be established by qualified psychiatric experts. Additionally, the emphasis on mental health in criminal law stems from a strong conviction that certain mental disorders can lead to crime, especially violent offenses, and that psychiatric treatment can address these conditions and lessen the chance of reoffending. The development of modern forensic psychiatry is tied to various advancements, including improved knowledge of how mental illness relates to criminal behavior, the creation of legal definitions of insanity, new approaches to treating mental disorders outside of jail, and changing social attitudes towards mental health, all of which are recognized as significant milestones. However, recent progress in forensic psychiatry seems to be influenced by a different range of problems and disagreements. Key issues include tensions between a focus on crime prevention for public welfare, punishment for criminal acts, and safety concerns, as well as a noticeable transition from a medical approach to handling mentally ill offenders to one based on rights. Research continues to explore how mental illnesses relate to crime, particularly violent acts, and discussions about the role of forensic psychiatry in determining offender accountability remain active within forensic and legal discussions. Questions about which mental health issues should be taken into account when assessing responsibility and sentencing are also debated. Moreover, there is a rising concern for legislation on mental health that respects human rights and the basic rights of individuals with mental impairments, leading to a complex legal framework that guides forensic psychiatric practices and presents new challenges.

## Free Will

Philosophers share two main ideas: first, moral judgments relate to an action only if the person is morally accountable for doing it; second, individuals are only accountable for those actions they freely decide to take [4]. Beyond these ideas, agreement often falls apart. For instance, there is discussion among philosophers about what it truly means for an action to be freely chosen, and if human actions can actually fulfill that requirement. A key point of contention is the belief in causal determinism, which most philosophers accept—the notion that every event, including every

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human decision, is entirely determined by the chain of events that occurred before it. One perspective holds that an action is freely chosen only if the person could have picked differently, even if every factor in the causal sequence leading to the actual decision remained unchanged. This view, called incompatibilism, asserts that free will – and therefore moral accountability – cannot coexist with causal determinism. On the other hand, a different perspective suggests that an action is freely chosen if the decision was not influenced by certain constraints, which can be either external (like pressure) or internal (like personal compulsion). This second perspective, known as compatibilism, claims that free will – and by extension, moral responsibility – can exist alongside causal determinism.

However, these are simply the perspectives of philosophers. What do everyday people believe about these issues? How do they understand the concepts of free will, moral accountability, and causal determinism? Do they find the idea of incompatibilism more appealing than compatibilism or the other way around? These questions have inspired scientific studies aimed at uncovering the psychological roots of this long-standing philosophical issue.

When it comes to the everyday view of free will, most evidence suggests that regular people do not regard free will in the complex way incompatibilism assumes. In general thinking, free choice means being free from specific local constraints that hinder a person from showcasing their values and commitments. This common understanding of free will aligns more closely with compatibilism, where the metaphysical debate about causal determinism does not impact the existence of free will. This is not entirely unexpected, since the idea of causal determinism is somewhat obscure, making it hard for people without a background in philosophy to grasp what concerns incompatibilists.

## Development

Responses to problematic drinking habits in close relationships can take on distinct patterns that can be very different from each other [5]. For instance, in symmetrical relationships, both partners may compete openly or secretly, arguing about who is right or wrong, whose needs are more important, or who requires more care. This contrasts with complementary patterns, where one partner holds a more powerful role while the other is submissive, often in areas like moral decision-making or caregiving. While these behaviors may not always harm well-being, if they restrict personal growth and relationship progress, they can shift towards more balanced and supportive ways of interacting that encourage secure attachments.

In relationships, the dynamics of power and control can merge with feelings of safety and security in attachment, leaving individuals feeling exposed and vulnerable. This is especially true when someone depends on a partner who is unkind. Both symmetrical and complementary patterns can intensify the situation, leading to conflicts in homes affected by alcohol. For example, one partner may react with anger, accuse, or criticize, causing a cycle of blame and frustration, which can escalate to physical aggression. Subsequently, the partner who drinks might

feel regret, prompting their significant other to take on a caring and controlling role, overseeing drinking habits, removing alcohol, and offering constant advice. These behaviors are influenced by each person's attachment histories and the effects of alcohol, which can impair thinking and reflection while increasing emotional volatility.

## Powerlessness

Feeling powerless is an important aspect of events that many view as traumatic [1]. Typically, trauma involves a significant loss of control where victims face situations they cannot influence. This experience can lead to a lasting belief in one's own powerlessness, which can hinder or severely impact the victim's life even after the distressing event has passed.

Having a healthy sense of will is crucial for mental health, particularly following trauma, loss, or extended periods of stagnation. To illustrate, consider the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly. When a caterpillar enters a chrysalis to start its metamorphosis, it begins to dissolve into a liquid state, losing its familiar shape completely. As it reconstructs itself, it takes on an entirely new form that seemed impossible before. Even as the butterfly emerges, it's not yet able to function. Liquids flow through tiny, vein-like structures formed from tangled tissue until gracefully shaped wings unfold. In the journey of recovering from trauma, reclaiming one's will acts like this fluid, filling lifeless wings until they can once again take flight. Even if the resulting self looks quite different from the person before the trauma, this renewal symbolizes a return to capability and the restoration of individual will.

The significance and impact of an effective will goes far beyond just healing from trauma. It plays a crucial role in mental wellness, and notably, this ability is accessible to everyone.

## Brain

Researchers exploring the brain are finding more evidence suggesting that our control over our actions is not as strong as we believe [1]. This may be partly because we focus on the behaviors we are aware of, while a large portion of our actions, reactions, thoughts, and speech occur automatically, almost without intention. Alarmingly, it is estimated that we consciously control only around five percent of our behaviors. Different fields such as psychology, neuroscience, philosophy, and law struggle to agree on how much control we truly have. However, it is becoming clearer that it is less than we often assume. While the amount of control may be lower than desired, the effectiveness of what we do have may surpass what we currently believe.

A will acts as a tool to encourage meaningful improvements in our mental health simply through intention. To comprehend this process and apply it effectively, we need to define what we mean by intention, and we must address the two aspects of will - its passive and active sides.

## Intention

In the realm of psychology and human thought, “intention” refers to a conscious choice to carry out a behavior based on deliberate reasoning [1]. Intention is not just about achieving your desires

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or dreaming about your ideal life. It's important not to mix up intention with feelings. Intentions are clear commitments regarding actions we plan to take. Naturally, these statements can be influenced by our desires, but what we want can change frequently and may not always align with what is best. Instead, intentions should be based on our core values, which are the priorities we consciously recognize as most significant. When formed around these higher principles, intentions help clarify our reasoning and behaviors. While "intentions" is sometimes used to express how we wish to feel, their true power lies in thoughtfully choosing our actions to reach our desired goals.

Within the brain, several neural pathways are involved in voluntary actions. All of these pathways eventually connect at a point known as the primary motor cortex. This center reacts to two types of input: voluntary cues and what is termed "stimulus-driven" input. In simpler words, the primary motor cortex will respond to direct urges from ourselves, or it will react automatically to external stimuli. The portion of the primary motor cortex that processes voluntary input gives humans the quality of "stimulus-independence"; it allows us to make choices.

## Genetics

Darwin's concept of natural selection revolves around the belief that for advantageous traits to persist within a population, they must be consistently inherited from parents to their children [6]. In other words, these traits need to be passed down through generations. While Darwin did not fully understand the mechanics behind this process, over a hundred years of scientific investigation has greatly improved our insight into it, culminating in the recognition of genes as the basic units of inheritance.

Humans possess approximately 20,000 to 25,000 genes that interact with one another and the environment, playing a significant role in defining the observable characteristics of every individual. Many people notice that some physical features often appear in families, suggesting that children are more likely to look like their parents than the wider population. Nonetheless, the notion that psychological traits, such as intelligence, personality, or even a greater likelihood of engaging in criminal activity, could also be inherited is a topic of debate.

A key method that researchers have utilized to investigate the heritability of various psychological traits is called behavioral genetics. This field examines how much of the differences in a specific trait (such as IQ) can be explained by genetic versus environmental influences. Heritability is quantified using a coefficient that ranges from 0 to 1, indicating the proportion of variation in the population that can be attributed to genetic causes. It is crucial to understand that heritability pertains to groups of people – it demonstrates where the variation comes from within the sampled population – and is not applicable to individual cases. Thus, if a heritability coefficient of 0.4 is found for a trait, we can conclude that genetic factors account for 40 percent of the variation in that trait within the population. However, this does not imply that genes are responsible for 40 percent of that trait in each individual.

## Offence Formulation

One aspect of forensic evaluation, known as risk-need assessment, is often employed to categorize individuals based on their risk level and corresponding need for support [7]. This aligns with the concepts of the well-established Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model. The RNR model suggests that there is a direct connection between risk and need and indicates that the factors linked to reoffending are the best targets for intervention. Generally, risk-need assessments use standardized tools that include items relevant to areas of risk or elements of a person's behavior and lifestyle that relate to criminal activity. This standardized method guarantees that "risky" traits are examined in terms of their existence and intensity, rather than merely depending on professional opinion to decide on risk levels and the necessity for intervention. Although risk-need assessments can reveal risk levels and contributing factors to this prediction, they do not clarify the origin, function, and persistence of harmful behavior patterns in the individual. Unlike risk-need assessments, which primarily rely on collective data and population-level predictors, a case formulation is personalized.

While performing a risk-need assessment, background details are collected, which also aid in developing the case formulation. This encompasses early development and life areas related to general offending (such as family, friends, substance use, relationships, education, and work) and previous offenses (including crime patterns and thoughts related to offending). It is essential to remember that the data compiled for the risk-need assessment is just one part of the overall picture; additional information is necessary for a thorough case formulation. Although a case formulation should take into account the entire individual, a specific problem formulation may help in this process. In forensic settings, these often concentrate on recent offenses and criminal patterns, acting as a basis to comprehend the immediate influences on offending. It is crucial that the formulation of an offense provides insight and explanations for how and why the behavior has emerged, its contextual factors, and sustaining elements, instead of merely summarizing the behavior. Important aspects of offense formulation include how past events have influenced certain reactions (such as sensitization, learned behaviors, reinforcement), schemas that have arisen from earlier experiences, interpersonal issues, immediate triggers, thoughts and feelings, and behavior patterns (like avoidance and aggression), along with their purpose (for example, self-defense or control). Functional analysis is frequently utilized to identify the reason behind the behavior, what causes and sustains it, and alternative actions that fulfill a similar role for the individual. Practitioners might also consider offense paralleling behaviors (OPB) during the formulation of the offense. OPB is a technique that examines similar repetitive behaviors that can be observed (in settings like prison or treatment) and can be further discussed with the individual. Therefore, OPB enables the observation of behavior and tracking of changes, alternative behaviors can be encouraged during the intervention, and hypothesized mechanisms and processes believed to impact past offending can be tested to determine if they continue to exist.

## Conclusion

Will refers to the capability to start and apply mental energy in

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order to achieve a selected aim or to delay or refuse unwanted wishes. The will enables a person to decide based on their reasons for acting. It is a thoughtful and intentional selection from various objectives, reflecting a person's ability to set goals and find ways to reach them. Actions undertaken based on these intentional goals are known as voluntary actions.

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