

University of Notre Dame
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Notre Dame vs. Yale.

"Dear Father: A group of us engaged in a rather heated argument this evening on the development of will power and the opportunities afforded for this at Notre Dame and at a well-known eastern university. No definite conclusion was reached after several hours of wrangling. The "pros" used the following syllogism:

"Exercise develops.

"The free will of the Yale student receives more exercise than that of the Notre Dame student.

"Therefore: The free will of the Yale student is more developed than that of the Notre Dame student."

"This syllogism in itself probably violates every rule ever written on mental discourse, but I hope it conveys the idea. We would all appreciate your opinion on the subject itself(not the syllogism) as it would be the most definite way of settling a biased argument."

We hate to be denied the privilege of tinkering with that syllogism, but we have to respect the limitations set by our correspondent. The kind of will power fostered by such a system as the syllogism presents is the kind the Irishman had. Asked at Ellis Island to which political party he belonged, he replied, "I'm agin the government."

Will power is a desirable thing, but the nature of the will places serious restrictions on its use. The will, you know, is the faculty of choosing between good and evil or between a greater and a lesser good, and a greater and a lesser evil. But the will is a blind faculty. It must depend on the intellect for a judgment of good and evil before it acts if it is to act in a reasonable manner. "The man convinced against his will" has strong will power, strong enough to hold out against sound reason, but such use of will power can hardly be called a desirable thing.

Shift the argument to character - where it properly belongs - and you can see the point more readily. Father Hull's definition of character, "Life dominated by principles," suits our purpose very well. A good character is dominated by good principles: the intellect lays them down and the will accepts them. If the principles are sound but the will is weak in carrying them out, the character is good, but weak. A bad character is dominated by bad principles: if the will is strong in carrying out bad principles, you have the thoroughly bad man; if it is weak, you have the disgusting weakling, who lacks the courage to be as bad as he would like to be.

It would seem, then, that there are at least two points to character development: 1. The presentation of correct principles for acceptance by the intellect; and 2. The exercise of the will in the acceptance of what is good. There is a third, if the proper fruit of character is to be supernatural virtue - it is the grace of God.

The "pros" have forgotten that the will may be developed by the acceptance of good -- they have centered their attention on the rejection of evil. How does the United States Army train men to the virtues necessary to warfare - courage, obedience, precision, and the rest? By turning them loose to follow their whims? Remember this: you can't teach a man to swim without putting him in the water, but the sink or swim policy will result in many deaths. Use safeguards in the beginning, while the principles taught are practiced, slowly at first, and then more freely. Notre Dame has stated officially, over and over, that her primary purpose is the training of Christian character. Yale may have the same high purpose; we do not know.

PRAYERS: Four deceased persons; four ill; three special intentions.