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A Free Will: Origins of the Notion in Ancient Thought
(review)

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In reading the nineteen essays of this volume, one realizes that in Plato there is not just one poetics, or two contrasting views on poetry, but—as the editors put it—“several models of what poetry is and what the poets do” (xxii). One would have liked that these several models be explicitly discussed in a concluding chapter. The editors, however, acknowledge that neither they nor their authors aimed at achieving a unified vision of the subject: “While certain recurring themes crystallize themselves with increasing complexity in the course of the various discussions, there remain both contradictions and incompatibilities between results on the one hand, and on the other a number of loose ends and unresolved issues” (xiv). In spite of this lack of unity, the volume reads well and many chapters are of very good quality. The editors state that they “have decided to avoid using Greek fonts in the text for the most part ... since the theme of this volume should also be of interest to those who are no specialist in either ancient philosophy or classical studies” (xi). The theme is certainly not confined to these specialists, but it is them that the volume primarily addresses. Greek words and phrases abound in the text, in both Greek and transliteration.

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Michael Frede. *A Free Will: Origins of the Notion in Ancient Thought*. Edited by A. A. Long. Foreword by David Sedley. Sather Classical Lectures, 68. Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 2011. Pp. xiv + 206. Cloth, \$49.95.

This magnificent book presents the partially revised version of Michael Frede’s 1997/98 Sather Lectures. Frede died tragically in 2007 before having completed his revisions, whose intended scope will remain unknown. In between, Frede authored three papers on aspects of free will in antiquity upon which the book barely touches. The book itself is written in Frede’s own inimitable style, making complex philosophical and historical ideas widely accessible by presenting them in deceptively simple language. As was Frede’s habit later in life, no secondary literature is cited; no footnotes are added; and often no references are given for the ancient texts he draws on. Rather, the reader is presented with a theory resulting from years of research, told almost in the manner of a story: a story that features famous figures like Aristotle and Augustine, as well as numerous rarely read writers.

Chapter 1 is an introduction to the main questions the book pursues: when and how the notions of a will and a free will originated, and what sort of notions they were. Chapter 2 explains why Aristotle’s conception of choice presupposed no notion of a will. Chapter 3 finds the beginnings of the notion of a will in early Stoic psychology and its full manifestation in Epictetus’s description of the will as an ability of the mind to make choices. Chapter 4 explicates how Plato’s and Aristotle’s admittance of irrational elements in the soul were the reason why later Peripatetics and Platonists modified Epictetus’s notion of the will. Chapter 5 places the emergence of a notion of *free* will in the first century CE, with Epictetus’s shift of emphasis from assent to choice and his joining of the Greek notion of freedom (*eleutheria*) with that of a will (*prohairesis*): a person’s will is free when her choices are rational and wise and no external circumstances can thwart them. Chapter 6 considers Platonist and Peripatetic responses to the Stoic theory of free will and its compatibility with divine providence and causal determinism. The main focus here is on Carneades and Alexander of Aphrodisias. Alexander is singled out as the only ancient philosopher who proposed an indeterminist notion of free will, as the ability to choose to act or not to act, given identical circumstances. Chapter 7 traces early Christian notions of a will, emphasizing Origen, whose view Frede argues to be basically Epictetan, and, where it differs from the Stoics, to rely on Platonist elements. Chapter 8 contends that Plotinus’s theories of god and free will were not based on Judaeo-Christian thought, but rather strongly impacted by Stoic philosophy, with some Platonist elements. Chapter 9 argues that Augustine’s notion of free will is based on later Stoic theory to an even greater degree than those of Origen and the early apologists.

Much of chapters 2 to 6 is in agreement with publications from the last twenty years. So, e.g. Frede points out that neither Aristotle nor the Stoics had a notion of free will, that in Epictetus (for the first time) the notions of freedom and will were combined, and that an indeterminist notion of free will occurs first in Alexander. The achievement of these chapters lies in the way Frede carefully joins them together and uses them as a basis for some substantive criticism and rewriting of the history of free will regarding late antique Pagan and Christian authors, in particular Plotinus, Origen, and Augustine.

Frede emphasizes that he considers his enterprise to be purely historical. As such, his target is twofold. He proposes a thorough revision of the prevalent idea of free will among theologians and historians, championed by Albrecht Dihle in his 1974 Sather Lectures, as capturing a common non-philosophical concept and originating with Augustine, impacted by Judaeo-Christian thought—which also influenced Plotinus. Frede replaces this theory with one in which the notions of free will in early Christians, Plotinus, and Augustine are largely variations of Epictetus's notion of free will, with Platonist adjustments as needed. Second, Frede argues that Dihle's favored account of free will, as unpre-determined sheer acts of volition, is central neither to Augustine nor to any ancient writer besides Alexander. Frede's own declaration notwithstanding, he also offers some incisive philosophical analysis of the notion of free will: he argues emphatically that no coherent account can be given of Dihle's conception of free will or of its ancient cousin, Alexander's indeterminist notion of free will.

The volume has been admirably edited by Tony Long. In a preface, he details his editorial contributions. His occasional "smoothing" of the language does not prevent those who knew Michael Frede from hearing him speak while they read. Long's most important addition are seventeen pages of footnotes that help the reader find passages to some of Frede's references, provide some of the secondary literature on which Frede relies, and furnish explanatory detail on the few occasions where the text appears inscrutable.

With its focus on the influences on ancient Christian theories, Frede's book will be of special interest to historians of theology. This said, *anyone* interested in the conceptual history of free will will find this book most rewarding. It is enlightening and thought-provoking. It is informed by extraordinary learnedness stretching from Plato to Plotinus in philosophy, in Christian theology from its beginnings, via Origen, to Augustine and beyond. The learnedness is matched by the author's philosophical acuity and judgment, and, besides, the book is eminently readable.

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Lydia Schumacher. *Divine Illumination: The History and Future of Augustine's Theory of Knowledge*. Challenges in Contemporary Theology. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. Pp. xiii + 250. Cloth, \$119.95.

Lydia Schumacher has written an ambitious book. Among the many things she tries to accomplish in the volume, three stand out to this reviewer. First of all, she proposes to reexamine Augustine's theory of knowledge. She argues that Augustine's philosophy is grounded in theology. For his theory of knowledge this means, by Schumacher's reading, that the aim of cognition is to enable the human being to regain its original status as "image of God," which latter state is manifested in knowing God and making God known. It is the mental, and by extension ethical, process of becoming God's image that Schumacher says we should, in the Augustinian context, take the phrase 'divine illumination' to signify. For Augustine, Schumacher insists, this process is an entirely internal phenomenon constituted by a self-correcting series of intellectual reflections on the part of the mind. In holding to this view, Schumacher emphatically rejects the understanding, common in scholarship, that "divine illumination" for Augustine had to do with mental reference to what she labels an "extrinsic" standard such as the eternal ideas in God's mind.