

## PREFACE

Free will is still a vibrant issue in contemporary philosophy and theology. After all, our ethics are based on the possibility of freely choosing between right or wrong; one's personal fulfilment is grounded on whether or not we will succeed to achieve our goals. But can man reach his supreme good – power, virtue, knowledge or salvation – by his efforts alone? Can individual responsibility exist without free will? Are human will and human actions self-ruling or are under some kind of control? Free will presupposes not only that there is always an option that can be chosen, without the option being forced or predetermined by an external agent, but also that this choice is relevant (and, in the theological field, decisive).

New frontiers, and new questions as a result, on free will have emerged from neurobiology and the debate on Artificial Intelligence, but the structure of many answers remains similar. Indeed, the principal lines of contemporary philosophical debates on free will – if free will is compatible with determinism or indeterminism; whether free will is a condition for the possession of moral responsibility or human dignity; and whether we are empirically free – all meet with interesting parallels in pre-modern disputes on this topic.

In this volume we want to show a mosaic of multidisciplinary investigations devoted to the debate of the freedom of will from the Late Middle Ages to the time of the Reformation. This mosaic consists of various expressions of the freedom of will from different periods, although we will also see many lines of similarities. We would like to show how questions on free will constitute a vortex of theological, philosophical and poetical thinking in this period. We also set out to demonstrate that the free will question is rarely treated as an independent subject, but is interwoven with related soteriological themes such as justification, divine omniscience and mercy, predestination, and moral responsibility. Debates about free will ineluctably involve debates about the structures of metaphysics, religion and ethics.

Through the following discussions we will show that, in order to understand the debate of the freedom of will in the Middle Ages, and in the

Renaissance and Reformation Period, we harvest much more knowledge of the debate if we broaden the scope and examine the evolution of the debate over a larger timespan. The contributions examine each individual thinker's elaborations on the will, starting from Italian 13<sup>th</sup> century poets and ending with Luther. These authors, from various periods and various contexts, well represent the comprehensiveness the free-will debate, especially with regard to the way that it was expressed not only in philosophical terms but also in poetry, theological treatises and sermons. The contributions in this volume help to discern continuities as well as discontinuities in the debate.

One crucial factor which is common for all of the thinkers is Christianity, which serves, as it were, the spiritual and ideological frame of the debate. The common context of Christian belief among these thinkers involves an additional common element, namely the role of tradition and orthodoxy: every thinker is striving towards 'orthodoxy' in the meaning that they want to express of the freedom of the will as it appears most logically in their conception of the Christian tradition and systematic thought. A specific subcategory of the role of tradition is the appearance of the 5<sup>th</sup> century theologian and bishop Augustine. The influence of Augustine on this debate in the Western Christian tradition cannot be overestimated, and this also becomes clear through the examinations of the volume. Just as the different expressions of the will, and its related topics, constitute a red thread of the anthology, so too the different thinkers' relationships to the writings of Augustine are visible in almost every contribution.

We will hereby see how this question is not a 'freestanding' debate, but one which connects the contemporary issues of the individual thinker at hand with his conception of the past's expressions of the will; the figures involved are not only discussing contemporary theology/philosophy but also addressing and using the past. This kind of approach, which seeks to broaden the scope and take one person from each period as a starting point, gives a fruitful basis of gaining new knowledge about the debate and thereby discover new lines and themes across the sometimes disturbing lines of demarcation between periods.

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