***Paradeigmata voluntatis* 2**
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# Rational Will, Free Will: A Fundamental Semantic Difference in Ancient Philosophy

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**Abstract** In this paper, I highlight a fundamental semantic difference within the concept of will: the difference between a *rational will* and a *free will*. It plays a major, but often neglected role in ancient philosophy. While Plato's contribution to the conceptual history consists in the idea of a rational will (*boulêsis*, as calls it in the *Gorgias*), it was Augustine who should be seen as the philosopher who introduced the idea of a free will under the name of *liberum arbitrium*. I reject alternative proposals, e.g., that formulated by Michael Frede that we should see Epictetus as having a full idea of a free will.

**Keywords** Rational will. Free will. Decisionism. Intrinsic goodness. Spontaneity. Indeterminacy. What is up to us (*to eph' hêmin*). Assent (*sunkatathesis*).

In this paper I wish to highlight a fundamental semantic difference within the concept of the will. This difference plays a major role both in ancient languages and in modern Western ones such as English, French, Italian, or German; however, it is widely neglected. What I mean is the difference between a *rational will* and a *free will*. What impedes us to clearly distinguish between these two meanings is the fact that, ever since the Latin expressions *velle* and *voluntas*, its modern equivalents like *will*, *volonté*, *volontà*, and *Wille* can be used to express both ideas, that of a rational will and that of a free will.

Likewise in the scholarly literature on ancient Greek, Roman theories of deliberate action, the two meanings of 'will' are often

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insufficiently separated from each other, although an appropriate disambiguation would be absolutely crucial in order to avoid confusions about the idea of will in antiquity. My claim is that, within the development of ancient philosophy, it was Plato who first formulated the idea of a rational will, whereas free will cannot be found before the Roman Imperial Age, namely, as I believe, in Augustine. Augustine, as we will see, offers an attractive conceptual dichotomy: he mostly uses the term *voluntas* for the rational will and the expression *liberum arbitrium* for the free will (even if he himself doesn't strictly follow this useful terminological distinction).

In the first section, I will distinguish between three different meanings of 'the will', but then exclude one of them as irrelevant for our purposes. In the second part, I describe Plato's contribution to the conceptual history of a rational will. Then, in the third section, the distinctive features of both notions are developed. Finally, in the fourth part, I will explain why Augustine should be seen as the first philosopher to introduce the idea of a free will, not, e.g., Epictetus. I will thereby defend my earlier thesis in some more detail.[1]

## 1

I want to start with a distinction between three different ways of using the concept of will and then focus on two of them. Let us have a look at the following three paradigmatic sentences:

a. Since Peter is extremely tired, he *wills* (*wants*) to go to bed; this is the only *will* (*wish*/*desire*) Peter has for the rest of the day.
b. This document is the last *will* of Mary before she died; even if it may be somewhat peculiar, we should respect it.
c. The reason for Susan's professional unsuccessfulness is the weakness of her *will*.

Perhaps, the usage of 'will' in phrase [a] – the 'wills' instead of 'wants' – sounds a bit strange in contemporary English, whereas it is a quite normal use both in Greek (*boulêsis*, *boulesthai*) and in Latin (*voluntas*, *velle*), and the same holds true for many modern languages such as French, Italian, or German. The sense meant here is that of a desire, a strife or a wish, or, to put it in classical terminology, an inclination or an appetitive tendency (*orexis*). I call this the *appetitive concept of will*. A will in the sense of an inclination can *per se* be more or less good, more or less rational. But this is not immediately inherent in the term. It need not be one rather than the

1 Horn 1996; 2014.

other. We will see in a moment that Plato coined the idea in the way that he restricted the expression *boulêsis* to a good inclination, i.e. the rational will. What is fundamental for such a rational inclination is that someone finds or discovers it within himself, having not created it voluntarily; an inclination is something perceived, not something generated by the individual.[2]

The usage [b], by contrast, is completely different from [a] .It presents the will as a faculty of choice, a power to bring about a decision. This decision can be more or less good and more or less rational, but it can never be unconscious: a volitional decision must always be deliberately chosen. Hence, unlike [a], the decision made by the will in the sense [b] can never be seen as something which the agent finds or detects or perceives within himself, but what he himself creates, produces, and generates. 'The will' in this sense is precisely the agent's ability to make an independent decision. Consequently, a decision brought about by this will must be fully imputable. This additionally implies that a volitional decision can be more or less arbitrary. It can be brought about independently of good reasons. My example [b], namely the last will of a person, might illustrate this point: we usually think one should strictly respect and follow someone's last will regardless of its possible weirdness and strangeness. I call usage [b] the *decisionist concept of will*.

Finally, there is a usage of 'will' in the sense [c]. I mention this usage only to be comprehensive: here, 'will' signifies something like a psychic power and a faculty to persevere, e.g. to go for a valuable end under difficult external circumstances. I call that the *dynamic concept of will*. Therese Fuhrer in an interesting article claims that we can identify [c] in Seneca;[3] but I cannot discuss this issue here. I tend to believe that [c] does not occur in ancient or medieval philosophy but seems to be typical for a certain line of modern philosophical thought, especially that of the nineteenth century.[4] Look, e.g., at the following passage from Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*:

> Life itself is essentially appropriation, injury, overpowering of the stranger and weaker, oppression, harshness, imposition of one's own forms, incorporation and at least, mildest, exploitation, – but for what purpose should one always use just such words, which from time immemorial are imprinted with a slanderous intention? Even that body within which, as was assumed before, the

2 Therefore, traditional inclination theories are typically perception models, not taste models.

3 Cf. Fuhrer 2010.

4 Will in the sense of an energetic power is meant, e.g., in Schopenhauer's work-title *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* or in Nietzsche's formula *Der Wille zur Macht*.

> individuals treat each other as equal – it happens in every healthy aristocracy – must itself, if it is a living and not a dying body, do everything against other bodies which the individuals in it abstain from doing against each other: it will have to be the bodily *will to power*, it will want to grow, to reach out, to draw to itself, to gain predominance – not out of any morality or immorality, but because it lives, and because life is precisely the *will to power*.[5]

What Nietzsche says is that life should be seen as basically dynamic. Appropriation, overpowering, conquering etc. are fundamental features of the force which characterises life in general. This force is, according to Nietzsche, the 'will' which strives for dominance. As far as I can see, this *dynamic concept of will* [c] is absent from our ancient sources. Let us now have a closer look at the uses [a] and [b], beginning with Plato's introduction of [a].[6]

## 2

In the history of ancient philosophy, we can identify the appetitive concept of will [a], connected to the words *boulêsis* and *boulesthai*, in a passage of Plato's *Gorgias* (466a9-467e5). In this dialogue, Plato's Socrates distinguishes between two kinds of directing one's desire to something, a rational desire on the one hand and an arbitrary desire on the other. This distinction is part of Socrates' rejection of the art of rhetoric as practiced and defended by his interlocutors, Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles. What Socrates aims to refute is Polus' thesis that orators and tyrants are exceptionally powerful in the cities since they are capable of doing whatever they want. According to Socrates, the opposite holds true: only a rational desire merits to be called 'willing' (*boulesthai*), whereas a non-rational form of desire is but an expression of a contingent intention. Since rhetors and tyrants do not act rationally they do not follow their will. Someone unable to follow his will is not mighty at all and does not, therefore, possess real power. The decisive passage runs as follows:

> For I say, Polus, that both the rhetors and the tyrants have least powers in the cities, as I was saying just now; for they do practically nothing, I say, they want to, but do whatever they think is best.[7]

5 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, sect. 259. Italics added.

6 I first developed these points in Horn 2014.

7 Pl. *Grg.* 466d6-e2; translation by T.H. Irwin.

According to these lines, orators and tyrants do nothing of what they want (*ouden gar poiein hôn boulontai*). Instead, they act on mere opinions (*poiein mentoi hoti an autois doxê beltiston einai*). To understand what Plato has in mind, we should first look at the second form of desire. The persons in question are striving for political power, pleasure, and honour, and use every instrument at their disposal, including expelling, expropriating, and killing their adversaries, to reach these goals. But the goods for the sake of which these actions are done are not really desirable: they are subjective, short-sighted, and illusory. As the formula *doxê beltiston einai* shows, they are founded merely on a *doxa*, viz. an unstable opinion without sufficient cognitive support.[8]

Plato expresses here his conviction that the expressions *boulêsis* and *boulesthai* should be reserved for something which I call the 'rational will'. What is such a will? Clearly, Plato does not give us the simple advice that an agent should always deliberate sufficiently before making decisions. What he is arguing for is much more interesting. Plato connects his account of a rational will with the concept of intrinsic goodness. Socrates asks Polus whether men "want the thing they are doing at any time or the thing for the sake of which they do the thing they do".[9] In the majority of cases one is acting for the sake of something different from what one is actually doing. Socrates illustrates this point by using the examples of taking drugs to regain one's health and of seafaring to become wealthy. To act according to one's will is to choose an intrinsic good, such as being healthy or rich, not a good of mere instrumental value. It means to act for a result that is good and valuable in itself. But when tyrants expel, expropriate, or kill their adversaries, they overlook the fact that such actions damage their own interests instrumentally since evil action harms the agent. Tyrants fail to see that their choices are made for the sake of bad results and that their actions do not merit to be described as 'willed'. Plato twice states that we do everything we do for the sake of the good,[10] a view that is close to the standard medieval formula *nihil appetimus nisi sub ratione boni*. Thus, only someone capable of identifying and following an intrinsic good can be said to possess a will in the full sense.

Plato's claim concerning the rational will is not restricted to the *Gorgias*. There are traces of it in several other dialogues.[11] Because of his concept of *boulêsis*, Plato seems in fact to be the founder of

**8** A view based on a changing *doxa* (in contrast to *epistêmê*) is not trustworthy; the most important Plato's texts treating on this famous distinction are *Meno* 98a; *R.* 5.474b-480a; *Tht.* 201a-c; *Ti.* 51d f.

**9** Pl. *Grg.* 467c5-7; translation by T.H. Irwin.

**10** Pl. *Grg.* 468b1 f.: *To agathon ara diôkontes kai badizomen hotan badizômen, oiomenoi beltion einai, kai to enantion stamen hotan estômen, tou agathou heneka, tou agathou*; and *Gorgias* 468b7: *Henek' ara tou agathou hapanta tauta poiousin hoi poiountes*.

**11** Pl. *Euthd.* 278e3; *Chrm.* 167e4-5; *Men.* 77e-78b.

intellectualism in Western theories of the will. If we take a closer look at the history of ancient thought, we find a remarkable ancient tradition of this concept. For instance, in the pseudo-Platonic *Definitions*, the term *boulêsis* is characterised as 'rational desire' (*eulogos orexis* or *orexis meta logou*).[12] In the same sense, Aristotle tells us in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that *boulêsis* is always goal-directed, partly towards some real good, partly towards some seeming good.[13] In the *Rhetoric*, he distinguishes between a rational and an irrational form of striving (*orexis*) and calls the rational one 'willing' (*boulêsis*), stating that its rationality is based on its orientation towards a real good.[14] Lastly, in his theory of the divided soul, Aristotle differentiates between three forms of *orexis*, reserving the term *boulêsis* for the soul's rational part, and ascribing bodily desire (*epithumia*) and emotional striving or appetite (*thumos*) to the irrational part.[15] We find the same definition of will as rational desire in early Stoicism. *Boulêsis* is characterised by Chrysippus as *eulogos orexis*, which denotes one of the Stoic *eupatheiai* and is to be understood as a rational tendency, present in every agent, but fully developed only in the wise man.[16] According to Chrysippus, all human actions should be in harmony with the "will of the administrator of the universe" (*pros tên tou holou diokêtou boulêsin*).[17] Translated into *voluntas*, the same concept is found in Roman philosophy, e.g. in Cicero, Seneca. In the *Tusculan Disputations*, we have an interesting passage in which Cicero reflects explicitly on the Stoic use of *boulêsis* as a stable and rational inclination (*adpetitio*) towards the good. Cicero renders this concept as *voluntas*.[18] In Seneca, the concept of *voluntas* is also mostly interpreted as a tendency of the soul which makes human actions right and generates good habits (*habitus*); the 'pure and good' *voluntas* is thus related to the concept of virtue.[19] Seneca, however, also uses *voluntas*

12 *Definitions* 413c8.

13 Arist. *EN* 3.6, 1113a15 f.: *Hê de boulêsis hoti men tou telous estin eirêtai, dokei de tois men tagathou einai, tois de tou phainomenou agathou.*

14 Arist. *Rh.* 1.10, 1369a2-4: *estin d' hê men boulêsis agathou orexis. Oudeis gar boultai all' ê hotan oiêthê einai agathon, alogoi d' orexeis orgê kai epithymia.* Cf. *Top.* 126a12-14.

15 Arist. *de An.* III 9, 432b5-7; cf. 433a24 f.

16 *SVF* III 173, 431 f.

17 *SVF* III 4.

18 Cic. *Tusc.* 4.6.12: *natura enim omnes ea, quae bona videntur, secuntur fugiuntque contraria; quam ob rem simul obiecta species est cuiuspiam, quod bonum videatur, ad id adipiscendum impellit ipsa natura. Id cum constanter prudenterque fit, eius modi adpetitionem Stoici* ***boulêsin*** *appellant, nos appellemus voluntatem, eam illi putant in solo esse sapientem; quam sic definiunt: voluntas est, quae quid cum ratione desiderat. Quae autem ratione adversante incitata est vehementius, ea libido est vel cupiditas effrenata, quae in omnibus stultis invenitur.*

19 Sen. *epist.* 95.57 (cf. Voelke 1973, 161 ff.) and 92.3.

and *velle* for bad inclinations and additionally, as Fuhrer points out,[20] for acts of declaration. In each of these contexts, the will is considered as a rational tendency directed towards an agent's true good. That is why I called [a] an *appetitive concept of will*.

## 3

Before we look at the conceptual history of the *decisionist concept of will*, I want to propose two criteria for identifying cases of [b]: I call them the *criterion of spontaneity or indetermination*, and the *criterion of conscious choice*.

*First criterion*: a decisionist concept of will [b] is present in a historical text, if the author refers to the ability of persons to make independent acts of radical decision and arbitrary choice between options, whereby the spontaneity of the will is assumed. The will appears here as an autonomous capacity of undetermined initial triggering, i.e., of starting a chain of causes. (Of course, this presupposes a certain range of freedom, even if it need not imply a full indeterminism.)

*Second criterion*: We are entitled to identify the concept of free will [b] if, in a text, an agent is characterised by being fully conscious of what she does. The agent must clearly know what is at stake and is hence responsible for the foreseeable consequences of her behaviour. The consciousness of the individual is seen as a higher-order faculty that is able to make decisions beyond rationality: it can perfectly choose the false option in full awareness of its falsity.

Now, concerning ancient philosophical action theory, I think, the story to be told on [b] largely coincides with that of the expressions *hekôn*, *hekousion*, *eph' hemin* and, later on, also *prohairesis*, whereas it does not rest upon the term *boulêsis*.[21] Additionally, we find some characteristic descriptions of the phenomena of deliberate choice and decision-making, such as Plato's well-known formula *aitia helomenou, theos anaitios* (*R.* 10.617e) or his distinction between involuntary and voluntary wrongdoings (*akousia te kai hekousia adikêmata*; *Lg.* 9.860e). But for reasons of brevity, I will focus on the *eph' hêmin* and *prohairesis* to figure out where we can find a fully developed *decisionist concept of will* [b].

In general, *to eph' hêmin* (*in nostra potestate*) means 'up to us', 'at our disposal', 'in our capacity'. Aristotle uses this expression in the context of his action theory in the first chapter of *Nicomachean Ethics III*. For Aristotle, the *eph' hêmin* covers every possible object of

20 Cf. Furher 2010.

21 A good survey is provided by Eliasson 2008.

our practical deliberation (*bouleusis*), someone's inner attitude (*prohairesis*) and action, including the consequences resulting from our activities.[22] That which is at our disposal is not confined to internal, mental states; it comprises the entire range of someone's practical faculties. What is 'up to us' means the totality of things that an agent can modify or influence. Aristotle points out that the agent must be the origin (*archê*) of what is *eph' hêmin*; this is clearly an element of what a free will is. Note that there is a difference between Aristotle's notion of the voluntary (*hekôn*) and the *eph' hêmin*: while the latter signifies what is fully at our disposal, the voluntary (*hekôn*) leaves room externally enforced actions. Aristotle would describe a murder committed under duress as 'voluntary'.

On the whole, I think that Aristotle does not possess a full concept of free will. Regarding the question 'who discovered the (free) will?', posed influentially by A. Dihle with regard to [b],[23] there has been a broad scholarly debate.[24] Up to certain point, I think that Michael Frede's position is the most reasonable. Frede, in his posthumous work *A Free Will: Origins of the Notion in Ancient Thought*,[25] describes the scholarly consensus by emphasising three crucial points: (1) neither Aristotle nor the older Stoics have a notion of free will; (2) Epictetus combines for the first time the notions of freedom and will; (3) an indeterminist notion of free will occurs first in Alexander of Aphrodisias. In addition to what Frede is claiming, I am convinced that there is much truth in a well-known article written by S. Bobzien.[26] However, I don't think that Frede deals adequately with the two criteria I just mentioned. Frede fails to shows that Epictetus is in full accordance with the first criterion, while Bobzien admits that Alexander of Aphrodisias does not fulfil the second one.

Let us first look at Epictetus, as Frede describes him. In Stoicism before Epictetus we encounter a much more restricted concept of *eph' hêmin*: what is meant by earlier Stoics is the capacity of giving one's assent (*sunkatathesis*) regarding the present *phantasia* (LS 62G, 62K). Within Stoic determinism, it is left open if there exist genuinely alternative options to choose for action. Nevertheless, already the Stoics before Epictetus formulated, according to Frede, two aspects of the *eph' hêmin* which hint into the direction of a free will: (i) that there must be causally efficient mental states at my disposal and (ii)

**22** Arist. *EN* 3.7, 1113b6-14, 1113b30-1114a7; EE 1222b41-1223a9.

**23** Cf. Dihle 1982.

**24** Two valuable papers which came to different conclusions on Dihle are Kahn 1988 and Irwin 1992.

**25** Cf. Frede 2011.

**26** Cf. Bobzien 1998.

that I must have alternative options to select between. Now, in chapter 5 of Frede's work, entitled *The Emergence of a Notion of Free Will in Stoicism*, the author explains why he thinks that Epictetus in fact arrives at the full idea of a free will:

> We have noted how Epictetus admonishes us to concentrate all our efforts on our will, on the way we make choices and decisions. The goodness or quality of people is a matter of the goodness or quality of their will (1.29.1). To be good the will has to be such that it accords with nature, that is to say, it has to be such as it is intended to be by nature or God. But by nature, we are told, the will is intended to be free (1.4.18). Epictetus claims that he wishes it to be his main concern, up to the very last moment of his life, that his will be free (3.5.7). What is it for the will to be free?
>
> Epictetus explains again and again that this is a matter of the will's not being prevented from making the choices it sees fit to make, of its being impossible to force it to make any choice other than it would want to make (1.12.9; 1.4.18; 3.5.7). *There is no force or power in the world which can force your will so long as it is free. The planets cannot force your choice. Even God cannot take away your free will and force your choice* (1.1.23). Nor, Epictetus explains (3.3.8-10), would God want to do so. For, after all, he has given you a will of the kind he himself has, a will which, so long as it is free, cannot be forced or hindered in making choices. *The situation completely changes once we attach our hearts to things in the world, make ourselves dependent on them, become addicted to them, enslave ourselves to them. Then the world begins to have an enormous power over us, and we begin to act under compulsion. We become dependent on, or the victims of, the course the outside world takes in presenting us with supposed goods and evils.*
>
> *So here we have our first actual notion of a free will.*[27]

Frede describes the position of Epictetus and characterises it "as the first actual notion of a free will". He rightly points out that a free will must be something which cannot be externally enforced, not even by the planets or by God. But another point seems problematic: Frede says Epictetus' will is free only as long as we do not "attach our hearts to things in the world, make ourselves dependent on them, become addicted to them, enslave ourselves to them". As soon as we do this, we lose our free will. And, in fact, Epictetus clearly claims that only the sage is in possession of a free will, while we fools don't have it. Look at what Epictetus says at the beginning of his treatise on free will:

**27** Frede 2011, 76-7. Italics added.

> He is free who lives as he wishes to live; who is neither subject to compulsion nor to hindrance, nor to force; whose movements to action are not impeded, whose desires attain their purpose, and who does not fall into that which he would avoid. Who, then, chooses to live in error? No man. Who chooses to live deceived, liable to mistake, unjust, unrestrained, discontented, mean? No man. Not one then of the bad lives as he wishes; nor is he, then, free. *And who chooses to live in sorrow, fear, envy, pity, desiring and failing in his desires, attempting to avoid something and falling into it? Not one. Do we then find any of the bad free from sorrow, free from fear, who does not fall into that which he would avoid, and does not obtain that which he wishes? Not one; nor then do we find any bad man free.*[28]

Epictetus clearly divides men into possessors and non-possessors of free will. And he connects the status of possession with that of being wise. But this leads to the consequence that, actually, almost nobody has free will – since nearly nobody has reached the status of a sage, i.e. the status of a person who always acts in a rational way. Moreover, Epictetus, in the quoted passage, describes the free will very much in terms of the rational will: in order to be free, the will must select valuable options. However, this violates my first criterion: in order to speak of a free will, an agent must have the faculty to do something wrong and immoral and to commit a crime. It must be the faculty for whose decisions one is held responsible.

Let us now look at Bobzien's account of Alexander. Bobzien argues for the thesis that we can find in the *De fato* of Alexander an explanation of *eph' hêmin* according to the idea of indeterminism. To make this plausible, she distinguishes between a 'one-sided, causative *eph' hêmin*' and a 'two-sided, potestative *eph' hêmin*'. Bobzien maintains that the latter expresses "an element of undeterminedness, by implying that we, qua decision-makers, can decide freely between alternative options, the one-sided 'depending on us' cannot be so used. Its function is to help to distinguish between different types of 'causes' of events, not to imply the possibility of freedom to do otherwise".[29] This is an interesting observation, and I think she is right on this. Nevertheless, concerning the question if Alexander has a full-fledged notion of free will, Bobzien comes a well-considered negative conclusion:

> These remarks may suffice as an illustration that Alexander is by no means clear and consistent about whether his phrases like 'having the power to do/choose opposites' are to be understood as indeterminist. This may be partly explained by the fact that Alexander

**28** Epict. *Dissert*. 4.1. Italics added.

**29** Bobzien 1998, 141.

does not have a fully-fledged concept of a faculty of a will, and *a fortiori* not one of a will that is free in that it can operate independently of the agent's beliefs and desires. This is so despite the fact that he has collected all the ingredients required for a notion of acting from free-will: he has endowed human beings with a two-sided power (*exousia*) of decision making, which

* is not necessitated by external or internal influence factors;
* is exercised as the result of a process of deliberation;
* is envisaged as separable from the agent's character, disposition, or nature;
* is envisaged – it seems – as separable from the agent's reason: we can decide against what appears to us as the most reasonable course of action;
* leads to decisions that are not causally predetermined by internal or external factors, so that it is possible that the same agent, with the same desires and beliefs, in the same circumstances, chooses differently.

But all these points do not add up to 'choosing and acting from free-will', since for Alexander the human soul is not separable from the body and in principle susceptible to causal impacts. It remains unclear what the independent decision-making faculty would be which has the power over choosing opposites: it can hardly be one of the non-rational parts of the soul. But if it is a, or the, rational part, the difficulty arises how it can – as Alexander suggests – decide against the course of action that appears as the most reasonable one to the agent: either this was not the most reasonable course of action after all, or it is not a super-ordinate rational part of the soul that decides. Thus, even if a decision is not necessitated, pre-determined or externally determined, there seems to be no suitable place for an independent decision-making faculty in Alexander's conception of the soul.[30]

I fully agree both with the list of criteria for a free will Bobzien presents and with her overall conclusion. It seems mistaken to assume that Alexander of Aphrodisias is the philosopher who 'discovered' the free will. Alexander does not meet my second criterion, that of a (higher-order) consciousness in the agent that is able to decide for a suboptimal option while clearly knowing that there is a better one. Again, as in the case of Epictetus, we see that he describes the free will in terms of the rational will and thereby does not arrive at the idea of a capacity which enables the agent to make arbitrary decisions.[31]

**30** Bobzien 1998, 171-2.

**31** Cf. also Bobzien 2000.

## 4

We find one of Augustine's first versions of a theory of free will in his early dialogue *De libero arbitrio* ('On Free Will', written between 387 and 391 AD). The Augustinian concept of free will is not confined to that text, but there are other early treatments of it.[32] However, in this dialogue we arguably read the clearest and most extensive discussion of this idea. The philosophical context in the *De libero arbitrio* is a debate on theodicy: Augustine raises the question if God should eventually be considered as the origin of the evil in the world (*utrum deus non sit auctor mali*; 1.1).[33]

The crucial challenge Augustine is confronted with by his interlocutor Evodius comes from moral evil. Evodius asks if we should consider God responsible for human misconduct because he created us as possibly sinful beings. Since it was God who chose the human constitution in exactly the form we now possess it, he created it including our faculty to go astray. God did so knowingly and is hence the origin of our nature and its consequences.

In this situation, Augustine introduces the concept of free will to resolve the threatening problem of God's responsibility for moral evil in the world. He claims that human beings are equipped with a conscious will which can select among better and worse options and which can freely bring about what it decided to do. Therefore, humans alone bear the blame for moral evil, and God is inculpable. Obviously, this is a difficult, yet fascinating line of thought. Augustine's argumentative strategy can only be successful if he attributes to human beings a capability to select without any inner or outer determination; a free will must be able to begin a causal chain without an antecedent cause. Moreover, the agent must be able to realise the selected option in full clarity, without any lack in consciousness and without a deficit in information. Augustine is thus forced to make some very strong claims in order to get along with what he wants to achieve.

Concerning this decisionist concept of will [b] as we find it in Augustine, I want to emphasise that his theoretical starting point implies both a certain affinity to the *eph' hêmin* and a considerable difference. In Augustine, the question of what is at our disposition has changed its framework from a eudaemonist context to a theological one. Whereas Aristotle and the Stoics are interested in what is up to us from the perspective of achieving happiness, Augustine is treating the problem in order to resolve a metaphysical challenge, i.e., that of

**32** Cf. also e.g. the passages *de duab. anim.* 10.14, *divers. quaest. LXXXIII* 68.5 and *in Rom.* 52.14.

**33** Important, yet divergent interpretations of Augustine's position are those by Arendt 1976; Rist 1994, and Brachtendorf 2006.

theodicy. His *liberum arbitrium* is a theoretical construct brought up to save God's integrity. Surprisingly, however, he arrives at an anthropological standpoint that ascribes to human beings even more freedom and responsibility than Aristotle and the Stoics, including Epictetus, conceded.

Can the will be adequately described as the ultimate and sufficient cause of a sinful attitude? Certainly not, as long as it is understood according to the appetitive meaning [a]. Apparently, what Augustine has in mind when he ascribes full moral responsibility to human will is not an appetite, a tendency, or an inclination, but the faculty to affirm or to reject the rational appetite that exists in every human being as the striving to ascend towards God. Note that he shares the Platonic conviction that we find within ourselves such a tendency. This is our natural directedness which remains sound unless perverted by our will. In the *City of God* 14.28, Augustine contrasts this tendency to return to God, the *amor dei*, with a sort of self-love that constitutes earthly communities.

Augustine thus has two different concepts of will, both the Platonic appetitive one [a] and the decisionist one [b] As N.W. Den Bok has convincingly shown,[34] Augustine begins in *Contra Fortunatum* (written about 392 AD) to differentiate between *voluntas* as an inclination and *liberum arbitrium* as a faculty to decide, even if he does not maintain this distinction in an exact terminological sense. In several passages, he combines the two elements, and he sometimes confuses them in a problematic way.

Giving us an idea of why human beings are fully responsible for their sinful actions is the first feature of Augustine's concept of free will in the sense of [b]: we possess a faculty of ultimate and sufficient causality in the sense of a two-ways-power, i.e., a faculty of decision. A second characteristic of the will according to the *De libero arbitrio* is also highly characteristic for the usage [b]. In order to attribute full moral responsibility to the person who commits a sin, Augustine describes the will as a faculty that can only be used with full consciousness. As Augustine points out, we cannot imagine of a will which is used involuntarily. Note that Plato in the *Gorgias* describes the possession of *boulêsis* precisely as a potentially unconscious ownership: The claim that rhetors and tyrants do not do what they want implies that they somehow possess the will without taking it explicitly into account. They neglect their will. In Augustine's description of the will in the sense of [b], such a negligence is excluded:

> Nobody can be certain with regard to those goods which he can unwillingly lose. Truth however and wisdom are lost by nobody

34 Den Bok 1994.

> unwillingly. For nobody can be spatially separated from these goods, but what is called separation from truth and wisdom is precisely a perverted will by which inferior things are estimated. *Nobody however wants anything unwillingly.*[35]

'Goods which can be lost involuntarily' is Augustine's expression for temporal or earthly goods. In the *De libero arbitrio*, immoral behaviour is defined as the "love for things which everyone can lose against his will" (*earum rerum amorem quas potest quisque inuitus amittere*; I.4.31). The will is immediately connected with our consciousness. It is hence something which cannot be lost (i.e., what I can only lose together with my personal identity). Therefore, it is a real good and is worthy or our appreciation. Nevertheless, the text mentions two other goods as real ones: truth (*ueritatem*) and wisdom (*sapientiam*). As we will see, the will itself is in fact a genuine good, but only of an intermediary value since it can take a perverse direction whereas both truth and wisdom are unambiguous goods that cannot be misused.

A further characteristic of the Augustinian idea of free will which I would like to point out is its affinity to Plato's concept of self-motion. Plato introduces the idea that soul is a self-moved entity in the *Phaedrus* (245c-246a) and develops this concept both in the *Statesman* (269d-e) and in the *Laws* (10.893b-896d). Self-motion is the faculty of the soul to be the first cause of its own mobility; by being a spontaneous cause, a cause without a cause, it is able to be in constant and eternal movement. What is interesting for our context is the fact that Plato in the *Phaedrus* conceives of self-motion by contrasting it to the sort of causal relationship which exists when a cause is different from its effect. The difference consists in the fact that in the case of self-motion soul "does not abandon itself" (*ouk apoleipon heauto*; 245c8-9). Only a self-related entity is able to be in permanent motion.

Let me add a little side note here. Plato, in his *Laws*, in fact briefly considers the idea that the human soul could be the origin of evil, based his notion of self-motion developed in book 10. The central passage on this point is found in 893b-896d in a discussion of the various kinds of motion. Plato there singles out self-motion as the most exquisite form of motion. He then concludes that everything that moves itself is alive and has a soul. If it is true that self-motion is primary, then, according to Plato, soul must be primary over all that is physical or material and must dominate the body. This leads to a remarkable consequence. At least for a moment, the possibility of considering the soul (here that of the cosmos) as the cause of evil is discussed, based on the idea of its absolute spontaneity:

35 Aug. *lib. arb.* 2.14.37. Italic added.

> [Athenian:] Shouldn't we, then, even concede what is necessary according to this agreement, namely, that the soul is the cause of evils and of the beautiful, of the immoral and of the just, as well as of the unjust and of all opposites, if we are to suppose it to be the cause of everything?
> [Cleinias:] How shouldn't we admit that?[36]

What Plato briefly touches on here is the idea that the soul has a spontaneous faculty that allows the agent to decide deliberately for disadvantageous and evil things as well as for advantageous and morally good options. Undoubtedly, it would be such a decisionist capacity that would guarantee imputability and punishability in the full sense. However, Plato discusses this idea only *en passant* and without clear affirmation.

But let us return to Augustine. The following passage of the *De libero arbitrio* (3.1.2) shows the enormous difference between him and Epictetus:

> I think you will remember that you have sufficiently experienced that mind can be made a slave of lust by nothing else than its own will. For neither by something superior nor by something equal can it be forced to this disgrace, since this is unjust; nor by something inferior since it cannot do this. Hence it only remains that this motion is its own by which it turns the will to enjoy from the Creator to the creature. If this motion is judged as guilty – and who doubts about that, seems ridiculous to you – then it is certainly not natural, but voluntary, and it is similar to that motion by which a stone falls down in this regard that like this motion is proper for the stone, that is proper for the soul. It is however dissimilar in this regard that it is not up to the stone to arrest the motion downwards, but mind is not moved in a way that it gives up the superior things and estimates the inferior ones, if it does not want it. Therefore, that motion is natural in the case of the stone, but voluntary in the case of the mind. Hence if someone says that the stone is sinful since it tends downwards by its weight, then I will not say that this person is more stupid than a stone; but he will certainly be judged as mad. But we charge the mind of being guilty if we prove that is left the superior things and preferred to turn to the enjoyment of the inferior ones. Therefore, why is it necessary to ask where that motion comes from by which will turns away from the unchangeable good to the changeable if we admit that it is by the mind and voluntary and therefore imputable; and every useful doctrine about that is capable to turn our mind to the enjoyment

**36** Pl. *Lg.* 10.896d5-9.

> of the eternal goof from the collapse to the temporal things after having disapproved of this motion and arrested it.

What is remarkable in this text is that Augustine combines two classical theories: On the one hand the theory of natural or elemental motion – a motion which is directed to the *topos oikeios*, and on the other hand the Platonic theory of self-motion. According to the first theory, everything which is movable is moved towards one's natural end. The stone has the natural tendency to fall downwards, and the human mind has the natural tendency to ascend to eternal reality. According to the second theory, the will possesses the capacity to stop its natural tendency and to turn to the temporal world. Furthermore, the text alludes to the doctrine of the *eph' hêmin* when Augustine declares that it is not up to the stone (*in potestate non habet lapis*) to change the direction of its motion. Nevertheless, this is not simply Platonist; it is rather a Christian transformation of Platonism.

The genuinely Christian component of this doctrine becomes quite clear from a passage in the *De civitate dei*, which I want to finally highlight. Augustine characterises the vice underlying the first wrong decision committed by the 'fallen angels' pride or arrogance (*superbia*). But he does not think that their *superbia* is part of their natural endowment; it is brought about by a radically free decision. It is interesting to see that he claims that there are no further natural causes for committing a sin, but also that there exist no good reasons to do so. Let us have a look at the passage:

> If the further question be asked, What was the efficient cause of their evil will? there is none. For what is it which makes the will bad, when it is the will itself which makes the action bad? And consequently the bad will is the cause of the bad action, but nothing is the efficient cause of the bad will. […] For if two men, alike in physical and moral constitution, see the same corporal beauty, and one of them is excited by the sight to desire an illicit enjoyment while the other steadfastly maintains a modest restraint of his will, what do we suppose brings it about, that there is an evil will in the one and not in the other? What produces it in the man in whom it exists? Not the bodily beauty, for that was presented equally to the gaze of both, and yet did not produce in both an evil will. Did the flesh of the one cause the desire as he looked? But why did not the flesh of the other? Or was it the disposition? But why not the disposition of both? For we are supposing that both were of a like temperament of body and soul. Must we, then, say that the one was tempted by a secret suggestion of the evil spirit? As if it was not by his own will that he consented to this suggestion and to any inducement whatever! This consent, then, this evil will which he presented to the evil suasive influence, – what

> was the cause of it, we ask? For, not to delay on such a difficulty as this, if both are tempted equally and one yields and consents to the temptation while the other remains unmoved by it, what other account can we give of the matter than this, that the one is willing, the other unwilling, to fall away from chastity? And what causes this but their own wills, in cases at least such as we are supposing, where the temperament is identical? The same beauty was equally obvious to the eyes of both; the same secret temptation pressed on both with equal violence. However minutely we examine the case, therefore, we can discern nothing which caused the will of the one to be evil.[37]

Augustine confronts us here with a thought-experiment. The two persons under consideration have – according to Augustine's line of thought – no differences at all, neither on the level of external causes nor of internal reasons. Nevertheless, one of them decides to commit a sin, whereas the other preserves his integrity. This implies that the decision for a sin is basically an arbitrary one: there are no good reasons to choose the sinful life instead of opting for a life with God. This becomes the more relevant since *De civitate dei* 12.6 is mainly devoted to the explanation of the fall of bad angels. Given the intellectual excellence of angels and their formerly happy life with God before the fall it becomes manifestly difficult to explain what might have inspired them to turn away from the divine source of happiness. Obviously, the only plausible answer must be: an arbitrary decision without good reasons – or even: against all better reasons.

Augustine's description of a conscious, but irrational or unreasonable decision contains an innovative element. For the first time in ancient philosophy, he describes full moral responsibility based on the idea of free will. Ever since, this idea is something like a standard view: most people interpret accountability for bad and blameworthy actions in a way that resembles Augustine's solution. By blaming or punishing someone we mean that the perpetrator selected a morally or legally wrong option having, at the same time, knowledge of the immoral or illegal character of that action. The agent chose deliberately; he or she could have done otherwise. Therefore, I believe that Frede's view of Augustine is mistaken when he says:

> Hence also in this regard Augustine's notion of the will as something which is centrally involved in any cognitive act is nothing new. It is just the Stoic notion of the will.[38]

37 Aug. *civ.* 12.6.

38 Frede 2011, 159.

Frede describes Augustine's concept of will close to that of Epictetus in that also an act of believing presupposes the voluntary assent of the agent. But he neglects that the true difference lies elsewhere: in Augustine's concept of a sinful consciousness. A consciousness is a mental capacity which makes its bearer aware of options to act without necessarily highlighting the most rational one as the best.

To conclude, we see how the two different concepts of will, the rational will of Plato and the free will of Augustine, are closely interrelated, yet at the same time deeply different. Whereas the rational will is to be described as a tendency or an inclination in us directed towards a true good, not an arbitrary one, the free will is an open, undirected capacity to arbitrarily choose between given options. The rational will results from right thinking and sound practical deliberation, while the free will is the product of our consciousness which neutrally presents us a manifold of options among which we can select. Maybe a full-fledged concept of consciousness is as late as Plotinus.[39] However this may be, given the fact that the concept of right reason in ancient philosophy is much older than that of consciousness it is unsurprising that the idea of a rational will occurs much earlier than that of a free will – even if already Plato took important first steps into this direction.[40]

**39** Cf. the illuminating monograph of Hutchinson 2018 which highlights Plotinus' original contributions.

**40** I would like to thank Craig Martin for correcting my English.

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