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

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Classical World, Volume 106, Number 3, Spring 2013, pp. 535-536 (Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: *https://doi.org/10.1353/clw.2013.0068*

But these are small points which certainly do no harm to the whole. Without much trouble, each can be remedied in a subsequent edition. This intriguing book with its multinational narrative of brave soldier-spy-scholars should find a wide reading audience. It stands as a powerful testament to the ongoing involvement and enduring value of classical archaeology and classical studies to the modern world.

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Michael Frede. *A Free Will: Origins of the Notion in Ancient Thought*. Sather Classical Lectures, 68. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011. Pp. xiv, 206. $60.00 (hb.). ISBN 978-0-520-26848-7; $29.95 (pb.) ISBN 978-0-520-27266-8.

Edited by A. A. Long, with a foreword by David Sedley.

In these posthumously published Sather Lectures, delivered at Berkeley in 1997–98 and edited by A. A. Long after the author's untimely death in 2007, Frede contests the assumption, common among philosophers today, that free will is an "ordinary" human notion independent of substantive theoretical commitments. But neither is it a distinctively Christian notion that first emerges in the works of Augustine, marking a radical break with pagan antiquity—a proposal made popular by Albrecht Dihle in his own Sather lectures (*The Theory of the Will in Classical Antiquity,* 1982). One of Frede's larger points is that a proper appreciation of pagan philosophy in late antiquity reveals its great continuities with early Christian thought. While Christianity is responsible for the widespread dissemination of the notion of free will, Frede argues, the notion itself originates in the philosophy of the Stoic Epictetus (55–135 C.E.). It gets absorbed into late Platonism along with other Stoic doctrines, whence it is transmitted to early Christian writers like Origen and Augustine in the third and fourth centuries.

There is no notion of a will, let alone a *free* will, in thinkers before the Stoics, Frede argues, for it is only with the Stoic doctrine that all human actions are the result of assent (συγκατάθεσις) that we encounter the notion of a will: that is, a power of choice or decision whose activity is a mental event that precedes all our actions. Later Peripatetics and Platonists, who have absorbed into their psychology of action the Stoic doctrine of assent, may also be credited with a notion of the will. Such a notion, Frede stresses, is not thereby a notion of a *free* will, even if combined with the assumption that our actions are "up to us" (ἐφ᾽ ἡμῖν), a phrase often wrongly translated "free," but that in fact invokes the quite distinct notions of responsibility and control. (His very useful further discussion, "The ἐφ᾽ ἡμῖν in ancient philosophy," *Φιλοσοφία* 37 [2007] 110-23, is unfortunately omitted from the bibliography.) Frede masterfully tracks the disagreements and developing positions of Platonists, Stoics, and Peripatetics about the nature of the ἐφ᾽ ἡμῖν, and its shifting relations to the ἑκούσιον, the αὐτεξούσιον, αὐτοπραγία, and ἐλευθερία, but it is specifically ἐλευθερία that Frede has in mind as the "freedom" of the will. Thus, he identifies Epictetus' invocation of a προαίρεσις that is ἐλευθέρα as the first occurrence of the notion of a free will (*Diss.* 1.4.18).

Frede traces the different uses to which this notion is put by Alexander of Aphrodisias, Origen, Plotinus, and Augustine. He concludes that the notion of a free will is construed consistently across all these authors in its original Stoic sense: that is, as the ability to make correct choices in pursuit of a good life. To have freedom of the will thus requires that one not be forced to make choices incompatible with living well or be prevented from choosing correctly. It does not require an unconditioned "sheer act of will" undetermined by antecedent conditions—a notion that, in many circles today, has usurped the mantle of "freedom of the will" (and is the conception whose origin Dihle finds in Augustine). This is neither Augustine's nor Origen's notion of a free act of will, according to Frede. Nor is it that of Plotinus, who attributes such freedom only to God but not to human souls. The only ancient proponent of such a view, he finds, is the Peripatetic Alexander of Aphrodisias, whose position is driven by a "hopelessly misguided" picture of merit and desert that is not to be found in Aristotle himself.

Although Frede describes his project as a "historical" inquiry, he brings to bear on his material an acute philosophical intelligence. His exposition is compressed, sometimes breathtakingly astute, and occasionally inscrutable. The notes supplied by Long, with occasional supplements by the late Robert Sharples, are a welcome guide to the primary texts and secondary literature, as well as to Frede's own meaning. The lectures engage at some length with continuous texts (e.g., Plotinus, *Ennead* VI.8 and Augustine, *De libero arbitrio voluntatis*), but more often proceed synthetically, reconstructing debates between schools, or expounding philosophical doctrines. Of particular value is Frede's overview of Stoic psychology in chapters 3 and 4, which extends his distinctive interpretation of the impulsive impression (φαντασία ὁρμητική), and his elucidation of the divine rationality invoked in the Stoic doctrine of providence (pervasive across chapters 5 through 7).

While a deep appreciation of ancient Stoicism is perhaps the intellectual core of this wide-ranging study, and a demonstration of the depth of Augustine's roots in that tradition is one of its most striking findings, the case it makes for the Platonist roots of early Christian doctrine is also compelling. As a superb example of the light that can be cast on our self-understanding by scrupulous scholarship in the history of philosophy, these lectures are a fitting monument to the memory of one of the greatest advocates and practitioners of the genre.

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J. A. Baird and Claire Taylor. *Ancient Graffiti in Context*. Routledge Studies in Ancient History. New York: Routledge, 2011. Pp. xiv, 243. $135.00 (hb.). ISBN 978-0-415-87889-0; $49.95 (pb.). ISBN 978-0-415-65352-7.

This volume is a collection of ten papers from a workshop organized by the editors at the University of Leicester in November, 2008. The editors' opening essay, "Ancient Graffiti in Context," presents a excellent introduction to this field of classical scholarship, identifying its problematic parameters, its history of scholarship, and some of the new directions of research illustrated by the other papers.