

Free Will in Theology,
Neuroscience, and in a Cross -
Cultural Perspective (自由意志)
— A New Approach

自由意志在神學、神經科學以及
一個跨文化的觀點 ——
一個新的進路

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Abstract

This article treats three topics. The introduction shows the importance of the idea of man for man's self-understanding. The first part is dealing with the problem of free will as depending on a specific culturally determined anthropology. The Greek philosophy as well as Chinese anthropology (import from Western philosophy: 自由意志) and also the natural sciences in the first part of the twentieth century did not have a concept of will. The second part describes the development in the Occidental Church, which provided Western tradition with three concepts of free will. St. Thomas Aquinas elaborated one of these concepts, the *liberum arbitrium*. He connected the anthropological dimensions of *ratio* and *voluntas*, dating back to St. Augustine, thus bringing a century long discussion about free will to its culmination. His focus was on the *ratio*. William of Ockham developed a concept of voluntarism and refused the *liberum arbitrium*. Instead, he emphasized the autonomous self-determining will-activity. His focus was on the *voluntas*. Finally it was Meister Eckhart, who deviated significantly from these two competing traditions by a new mystical theology based on experience. From his new idea of the birth of God in man's soul (German: Gottesgeburt), he came to a new understanding of the role of the will. The will must be relinquished in order to set man free for the birth of God in man's soul. His focus is on the self-relinquishing of the will. The third part compares these three dimensions of the theological anthropology with the results of the modern neurosciences. Modern neuroscience claims that according to certain experimental results the human will is not free, which has far

reaching consequences for ethics, responsibility, and guilt. The model of freedom of will is defended against the reductionist methodology of neuroscience by a model of graduation, encompassing six degrees of free will. In this graduation the three concepts of freedom of will from theology are included. The basic claim is that freedom of will is a task to be achieved, a task for which the concept of neuroplasticity is essential. Mysticism is the kind of religion, which focuses very much on this task to achieve freedom of will by transcending the will. The article ends with some cross-cultural and cross-religious considerations concerning the ubiquity of freedom of will in the mystical traditions of all world religions, including Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. It is recommended to do cross-cultural comparison also for the Chinese mystical tradition. The final conclusion is that man should achieve the highest form of freedom, which is that of creative freedom, in the final analysis brought about by the Holy Spirit.

Keywords: Free Will, Liberum Arbitrium, Neuroscience, Law of Nature, Creativity