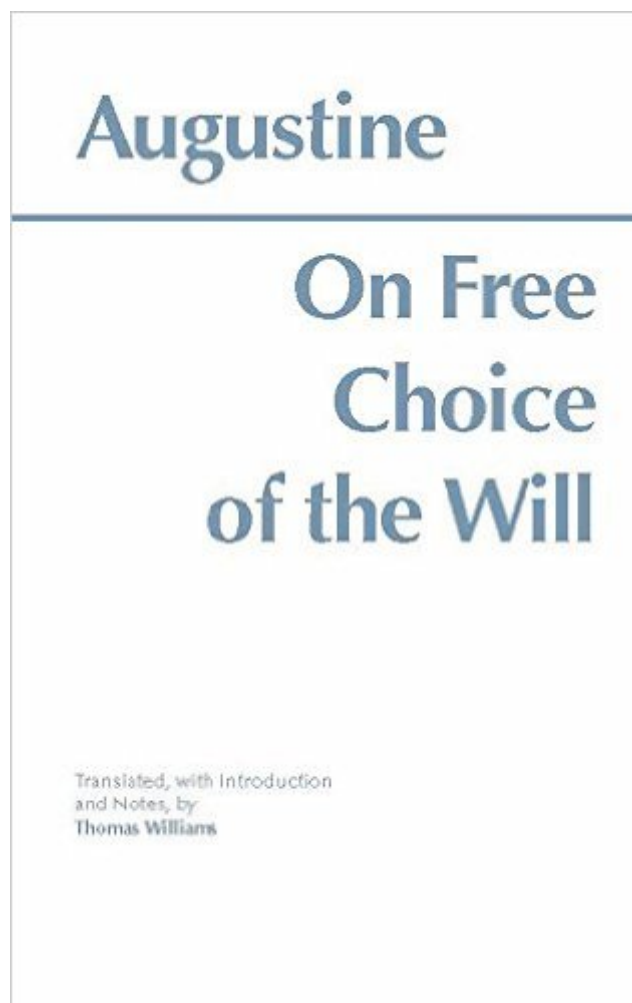


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On Free Choice Of The Will (Hackett Classics)



Synopsis

Translated with an uncanny sense for the overall point of Augustine's doctrine. In short, a very good translation. The Introduction is admirably clear.--Paul Vincent Spade, Indiana University

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

If you were looking for a significant and representative but introductory level medieval Christian philosophy text, you would be hard pressed to find one better than this. When I teach intro to philosophy, I often choose representative texts from the ancient, medieval, early Modern, and roughly contemporary periods. I start with Plato, either the Apology or the Meno or both. Then we read this book. Then Descartes' Meditations. Finally, we read something from Nietzsche, de Beauvoir, or from an early American philosopher (e.g. Thoreau). This book is an excellent part of the sequence because it introduces free will, and introduces it in a way that is very relevant to Descartes' discussion of will in connection with error. Plato (and the ancients generally) didn't really have a notion of the will: our choices are dictated by our level of understanding. Augustine understood that the Christian notion of sin entails something more radical than mere ignorance -- I must, he thought, be in some real way capable of unmotivated choice if I am to be blamed for my actions. There are other great bits in this dialogue -- one that it IS a dialogue and so forms a nice segway from Plato's dialogues. Another is its articulation of a proof of existence that prefigures Descartes' cogito and a proof of God that is remarkably similar (though very different in intent) to

Descartes' first proof in the meditations.

This is one of Augustine's early writings, from soon after his conversion. It records a conversation between himself and Evodius regarding free will. ... Augustine had very little access to Plato, and at this point in his life, probably nothing not quoted by another source. The dialogue is in fact based upon a real conversation, and not just a literary creation (a result of the philosophical community that Augustine lived in for some time after his conversion). However, Augustine edited it and added material (most of Bk. III) before publishing it. The main things I thought a reader ought to note when reading this short work are (1) This is still the beginning of work on the will - it was not a major issue in philosophy until Augustine, although bits and pieces may be found, e.g. in Cicero; (2) Augustine's style is quite different from what most people are used to, especially since this is a record of an actual conversation; (3) the problem of evil for Augustine is of a different nature than that promulgated in modern times; (4) the only two people who had a paradigmatically free will were Adam and Eve - everyone else has a less than free will and requires God's grace to will effectively, even when they wish to do good. It is an interesting work but still represents the early thought of Augustine. Those without a Neoplatonic background will find some of its arguments strange. There is no good introduction to Augustine - in my experience, you have to read a great deal of him in order to understand the typical way he thinks and the concepts he relies upon implicitly. Some Plotinus is probably useful.

Excellent work on the "problem of evil" in religion. For serious intellectual contemplators only.

Whether you ultimately agree or disagree with Augustine's premise, you will certainly appreciate the depth in which he addresses an issue that the world's most prolific religions readily ignore. If God is all good and God is the creator, why is there bad?

As far as I have discovered, this is the eighth English translation of this work. It is the most modern and readable. The others are out of print. It is not a fast read. Augustine often backs up five steps to make a point as solid as possible. In such a small book, only a limited number of the ramifications of the issue of free will can be well covered. Although the main topic of the book is man's Will, which Augustine addresses effectively [another reviewer's comment that only Adam&Eve had full Free will is of paramount relevance to this problem], the real gem in this book is to be found in Book 2: the nature of Truth. I guess I should not be surprised that no reviewer has commented on it here. None of the eight editors of the eight versions since 1929 of this work makes a significant comment on this

most important of topics. Throughout history only a handful of people have commented on the topic: Anselm, Grosseteste, Aquinas, Malebranche, Nash. Please visit my website to see the results of my research on this topic. In Book Two, spread out over many paragraphs, is Augustine's Definition of the word 'Truth'. It is the earliest and best formulated definition of 'Truth' in all of literature. There are hints in the Hermetic writings and earlier church fathers that show that Augustine possibly had some help in his formulation. But in spite of the fact that he depends upon the erroneous Platonic ideas that numbers and geometric shapes are eternal, his definition is unsurpassed but sadly overlooked. Buy this book and read only Book 2, and see a masterpiece of philosophy.

A Great look at free will. I find that reading on Calvinist and Armenian issues its easier to go back before John Calvin and read early views on the same theological issues without all of todays trigger words that instantly make you think of certain things.

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