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Moral Agency and its Constraints:
Fate, Determinism and Free Will in the Middle Ages

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PRESENTAZIONE

*By combining concepts, methods and approaches from different fields (history of philosophy, philology, textual criticism, history of science, intellectual history), the contributions gathered in this volume aim at collecting and publishing unedited texts, accompanied by commentaries and critical studies, in order to enhance the knowledge of a crucial philosophical paradigm of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, namely the relationship between the free will of human beings and determinism, and consequently the possibility of foreknowing the future.¹ There was a huge movement concerning the translation of texts of natural philosophy (of Greek or directly Arabic origin) into Hebrew and Latin, which was accompanied by a corpus of astrological, hermetic and alchemic writings as well as those on magic and divination. From the first half of the 12th century on, these translations did not only give rise to a new scientific library in the West, but they also generated (thanks, above all, to the works of Aristotle, Ptolemy, al-Kindi, Albumasar and Avicenna) the idea – still relatively unknown in the Latin world – that nature was a structure based on a rational system and as such predictable and manipulable through opportune theoretical competence and adequate operative techniques. Albert the Great, to mention only one, elaborating on Avicenna's theories, frequently proposes the paradigm of the sapiens – philosopher, astrologer, magician and prophet – who, thanks to perfect knowledge of the celestial powers, of their influence on the sublunary world and of the occult properties of stones, plants and animals, is able to foresee future events, to interpret and bend to his will the *implexio causarum* which is the basis of the natural order, and even to perform marvellous transformations of material reality.²*

1. For a general overview on this topic, see P. Porro, *Trasformazioni medievali della libertà*, in M. De Caro - M. Mori - E. Spinelli (cur.), *Libero arbitrio. Storia di una controversia filosofica*, Carocci, Roma 2014, 171-190; 191-221.

2. See A. Palazzo, *The scientific significance of fate and celestial influences in the mature works by Albert the Great: De Fato, De somno et vigilia, De intellectu et intelligibili, Mineralia*,

Some aspects of this problem have already been investigated in previous studies.³ The texts selected, such as the anonymous Estimaverunt Indi,⁴ William of Moerbeke's Geomantia,⁵ Honorius Augustoduniensis' Libellus

in A. Beccarisi - R. Imbach - P. Porro (cur.), *Per perscrutationem philosophicam. Neue Perspektiven der mittelalterlichen Forschung*, Meiner Verlag, Hamburg 2008, 55-78.

3. L. Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, Columbia University Press, New York 1923, II, 548-592; Ch.H. Haskins, *Studies in the History of Mediaeval Science*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1960; E. Garin, *Lo zodiaco della vita. La polemica sull'astrologia dal Trecento al Cinquecento*, Laterza, Bari 1976; G. Federici Vescovini, *Astrologia e scienza*, Vallecchi Editore, Milano 1979; S. Caroti, *L'Astrologia in Italia. Profezie, oroscopi e segreti celesti, dagli zodiaci romani alla tradizione islamica, dalle corti rinascimentali alle scuole moderne: storia, documenti, personaggi*, Newton Compton, Roma 1983; T. Gregory, *Mundana sapientia. Forme di conoscenza nella cultura medievale*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma 1992 (Raccolta di studi e testi, 181); E. Grant, *Planets, Stars, and Orbs. The Medieval Cosmos, 1200-1687*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994; Ch. Burnett, *Magic and Divination in the Middle Ages: Texts and Techniques in the Islamic and Christian Worlds*, Routledge, Aldershot 1996 (Variorum Collected Studies Series, 557); C. Crisciani - M. Pereira, *L'arte del sole e della luna. Alchimia e filosofia medievale*, Fondazione CISAM, Spoleto 1996 (Biblioteca di Medioevo Latino, 13); P. Travaglia, *Magic, causality and intentionality: the doctrine of the rays in al-Kindi*, SISMELE - Edizioni del Galluzzo, Firenze 1999; N. Weill-Parot, *Causalité astrale et science des images au Moyen Age: Éléments de réflexion*, «Rev. Hist. Sc.», 52 (1999), 207-240; S. Rapisarda, *A Ring on the Little Finger: Andreas Capellanus and Medieval Chiromancy*, «Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes», 69 (2006), 175-191; M. Benedetto, *Everything is in the Hands of Heaven, Except the Fear of Heaven (BT Berachoth 33b). Determinism and Freedom in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, in L. Sturlese (cur.), *Mantik, Schicksal und Freiheit im Mittelalter*, Böhlau Verlag, Köln-Weimar-Wien 2011, 153-174; A. Sannino, *Il De mirabilibus mundi tra tradizione magica e filosofia naturale*, SISMELE - Edizioni del Galluzzo, Firenze 2011; L. Sturlese (cur.), *Mantik, Schicksal und Freiheit im Mittelalter*, Köln-Weimar-Wien 2011; A. Fidora, *Divination and Scientific Prediction: The Epistemology of Prognostic Sciences in Medieval Europe*, «Early Science and Medicine», 18 (2013), 517-535.

4. Th. Charmasson, *Recherches sur une technique divinatoire: la géomancie dans l'Occident médiéval*, Champion, Genève-Paris 1980 (Centre de Recherches d'Histoire et de Philologie de la IV^e Section de l'École Pratique des Hautes Études, V Hautes Études Médiévales et Modernes, 44), III-113.

5. A. Beccarisi, *Naturelle Prognostik und Manipulation: Wilhelm von Moerbeke's De arte et scientia geomantiae*, in Sturlese (cur.), *Mantik, Schicksal und Freiheit im Mittelalter*, 109-127. The *Geomantia* attributed to William of Moerbeke is currently edited by Elisa Rubino within the scope of the FIRB project funded by MIUR (Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca) «Foreseeing Events and Dominating Nature: Models of Operative Rationality and the Circulation of Knowledge in the Arab, Hebrew and Latin Middle Ages» (Local Unity Lecce, coordinated by Alessandra Beccarisi and Principal Investigator, Marienza Benedetto, Università di Bari).

de libero arbitrio and Inevitabile, Sirenus' De fato, however, have largely been neglected, mainly because they are still unavailable as modern critical editions or are transmitted only in Renaissance printed editions that often prove to be unreliable from the perspective of modern text criticism.

Various topics are discussed in this volume: theoretical and operative models of prediction and control of events (Carlos Steel); the audience, circulation and efficacy of works on divinatory arts (Irene Zavattero, Elisa Rubino and Stefano Rapisarda); natural paradigms of divination, knowledge and rationality supporting the foresight of future events (Georgi Kapriev); the relationship between determinism and freedom (Nadia Bray and Andreas Speer); fate and providence (Guy Guldentops and Pasquale Arfè); natural causality and determinism (Thomas Ricklin); free will and intellect (Marialucrezia Leone).

Consequently, this volume is divided into two thematic parts.

The first part consists of historical-doctrinal contributions concerning the transmission of theoretical and operative models of prediction and control of events: divination, prognostication and, above all, geomancy. Developed essentially by the Arabs (although it also appears in Antiquity),⁶ geomancy is a technique which teaches how to form figures from points that are casually traced on earth or sand (but also on paper) and how to use these to foretell future events: the geomancer, it was held, was guided in his work by the natural influence of the stars, which enabled him to answer the questions that were posed to him on specific themes.

6. P. Meyer, *Traité en vers provençaux sur l'Astrologie et la Géomancie*, «Romania», 102 (1897), 225-275; P. Tannery, *Mémoires scientifiques. Sciences exactes chez les Byzantins*, É. Privat-Gauthier-Villars, Toulouse-Paris 1920, vol. VI; A. Ziegler, *Histoire de la géomancie latine du milieu du XII siècle au milieu du XVII siècle*, École Nationale des Chartes, Paris 1934; G. Contini, *Un poemetto provençale di argomento geomantico*, Libraire de l'Université, Fribourg 1940; M. Brini Savorelli, *Un manuale di geomanzia presentato da Bernardo Silvestre di Tours: l'Experimentarius*, «Rivista critica di storia della filosofia», 14 (1959), 283-342; Th. Charmasson, *Les premiers traités latins de géomancie*, «Cahiers de civilisation médiévale X^e-XII^e Siècles», 21 (1978), 121-136; S. Skinner, *Terrestrial Astrology Divination by Geomancy*, Routledge, London 1980; E. Savage-Smith - M.B. Smith, *Islamic geomancy and a thirteenth century divinatory device: another look*, in E. Savage-Smith (cur.), *Magic and divination in Early Islam*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2004 (The formation of the Classical Islamic world, 42).

The two important contributions by Irene Zavattero and Elisa Rubino are devoted to two of the most known geomantic treatises, the anonymous *Estimaverunt Indi* and the *Geomantia* attributed to William of Moerbeke. *Estimaverunt Indi*, probably a 12th-century Latin reworking of an Arabic treatise, is perhaps the most authoritative medieval text in the field of geomancy. Not only it is referred to as an “auctoritas” by several other geomantic writings, but it is also – together with the *De amore* by Andreas Cappellanus – the only text explicitly mentioned in the Prologue of the condemnation issued by Bishop Stephen Tempier of Paris in 1277.⁷ Today, nine manuscripts that preserve this text either in its entirety or at least in part are known. Irene Zavattero presents the first results of her critical edition: she has discovered that the final section of the *Estimaverunt Indi* circulated autonomously under the title *Liber Salcharie Albassarith*, both in Latin and in the vernacular. Therefore, Zavattero suggests that the widespread dissemination of the *Estimaverunt Indi* should be reassessed, and that it was due mainly to the fame of one of its sources – *Albusaid* or *Johannes Tripolitanus* – often cited in the *Estimaverunt Indi*.

The *Geomantia* was composed by William of Moerbeke from a collection of anonymous texts translated from Arabic into Latin probably in the 12th century.⁸ Even if not explicitly involved in the condemnation of 1277, this work has often been linked to the *Estimaverunt Indi*, one of its likely important sources.⁹ The text is as yet completely unedited. Fifteen Latin and three vernacular manuscripts (two in French and one in Italian) preserve this work.¹⁰ In this issue, Elisa Rubino publishes for the first time the Italian

7. D. Piché, *La condamnation parisienne de 1277. Nouvelle édition du texte latin, traduction, introduction et commentaire par David Piché avec la collaboration de Claude Lafleur*, Vrin, Paris 1999 (Sic et Non), 76-77.

8. M. Grabmann, *Guglielmo di Moerbeke O.P.: il traduttore delle opere di Aristotele*, Roma 1946 (Miscellanea Historiae Pontificiae, 11); J. Brams - W. Vanhamel (cur.), *Guillaume de Moerbeke. Recueil d'études à l'occasion du 700^e anniversaire de sa mort (1286)*, University Press, Leuven 1989.

9. A. Beccarisi, *Guglielmo di Moerbeke e la divinazione*, in A. Palazzo - I. Zavattero (cur.), *Geomancy and Other Forms of Divination*, SISMEL - Edizioni del Galluzzo (Micrologus' Library), Firenze 2017, 371-395.

10. E. Rubino, *Per una edizione della Geomantia di Guglielmo di Moerbeke. Il testo del proemio e della prima distinzione della prima parte*, in Palazzo-Zavattero (cur.), *Geomancy and Other Forms of Divination*, 93-134.

translation of the *Geomantia*, an important document for reconstructing the widespread diffusion of this work in Europe.

In fact, far from being considered a merely esoteric or superstitious practice, geomancy is recognised as a natural divination technique (and as such as being licit in appropriate areas) by, for example, Thomas Aquinas in his *De sortibus*,¹¹ Dante himself makes reference to it in the first verses of canto XIX of *Purgatory* (vv. 1-6):

*Ne l'ora che non può 'l calor diurno
intepidar più 'l freddo de la luna,
vinto da terra, e talor da Saturno
quando i geomanti lor Maggio Fortuna
veggiono in oriente, innanzi a l'alba,
surger per via che poco le sta bruna [...].*

Dante, however, is not an exception: Stefano Rapisarda's contribution analyses the spreading of divination in general and geomancy in particular in vernacular texts in medieval Occitania, showing that the use of divination in narrative texts is «not a marginal or purely erudite quotation: on the contrary, both techniques are used as narrative devices making the action progress at some decisive passages of the plot». Particularly interesting are the characters of the texts analysed by Rapisarda: not only troubadours, but also knights, popes and bishops are considered. This unexpected peculiarity confirms the importance of divination techniques not only in everyday life, but also regarding great and delicate decisions.

The main issues which constitute the problematic background and the theory of natural divination in the Middle Ages are behind and often at the centre of those texts: the relationship between fate and providence; determinism vs. free will; the definition of divinely inspired and naturally acquired prophecy.

Carlos Steel discusses precisely this complex of problems, taking the following assumption into account: If everything will necessarily take place as predicted, foreknowledge of the future seems to be superfluous and even needs to be avoided, as it may make one excessively happy or unhappy. Analysing

11. See P. Porro, *Divinazione e geomanzia in Tommaso d'Aquino: qualche osservazione sul De sortibus*, in Palazzo-Zavattero (cur.), *Geomancy and Other Forms of Divination*, 143-166.

chapter 13 of Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos*, Steel offers two main responses: First, not all future events one may predict from constellations will happen with absolute necessity. Second, even if the future event is inevitable, to know the future is not superfluous because «foreknowledge accustoms and calms the soul by experience of distant events as though they were present, and prepares it to greet with calm and steadiness whatever comes».

This is obviously an unresolved contradiction: If everything is determined, is there still room for free will? Thomas Ricklin's contribution tries to find an answer in Boccaccio's *Trattatello in laude di Dante*. Free will – an indispensable element in every astrological discourse – is transformed by Boccaccio into an "I accept". Boccaccio presents his own biography as the story of a man who, predisposed by nature from his birth to *poeticae meditationes*, learned later not to oppose his destiny described by the stars. He reveals himself as a poet who is not content with studying the stars for scientific curiosity or narrative reasons, but who lives intensively and even learns to voluntarily accept his task as a poet, determined by celestial disposition.

The second part of this volume is explicitly devoted to the relationship between freedom and determinism. Obviously, some aspects of this topic have already been elaborately considered over the past decades.¹² The contributions here presented emerge as reconsiderations of some of the issues developed by the authors in previous studies or examine texts that have for the most part been neglected by scholars.

Thus, by analysing the examples of John Cassian, Nemesios of Emesa, Maximus Confessor, John of Damascus and Photius of Constantinople concerning the issue of human free will, Georgi Kapriev demonstrates that the Eastern Christian tradition attributes a much broader competence to the act of the will, thus reducing the dominance of grace on the way to salvation: the few Byzantine philosophers, most of them with a strong inclination to Platonism, who maintained fatalism and predestination of human actions, remained an exception in the history of Byzantine philosophy. The claim that freedom is a constitutive property of the human being, since the human

12. See, above all, P. d'Hoine - G. Van Riel (cur.), *Fate, Providence and Moral Responsibility in Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Thought*, University Press, Leuven 2014 (Ancient and Medieval Philosophy, Series I, 49).

being is an image of God, is the common denominator of the Eastern Christian theology and philosophy departing from the Cappadocian tradition.

The same idea vehemently arises in the antifatalist controversy of Honorius Augustodunensis reconstructed by Pasquale Arfè. In the *Libellus de libero arbitrio* and the *Inevitable*, Honorius faces the problem of fatalism both in its astrological aspect, using the so-called argument of Carneades, and in the more strictly theological sense, interpreting the well-known biblical passage on the hardening of Pharaoh's heart (Ex 4, 21). As a result of Arfè's study, some new elements emerge concerning Honorius' philosophical and theological background: in addition to Augustine, John the Scot and Anselm, Honorius was a careful reader of Boethius' works, in which he found valid arguments for supporting the freedom of choice in the rational creature.

Andreas Speer directs his attention to the question whether the human being has free choice. The focus of his study is the analysis of Quaestio 6 of the *Quaestiones disputatae De malo* by Thomas Aquinas, a text which can be read as a detailed overview on the debates that took place in the last third of the 13th century in Paris concerning the challenging balance between free choice, natural causality and providential determinism. This is a challenge that arises also in contemporary philosophical debates and can only be solved, according to Thomas, in terms of a freedom determined by natural processes and the specific form of human reason.

The role played by reason with regard to the freedom of the human being, stressed by Thomas Aquinas, is also the keystone in the doctrines of Godfrey of Fontaines and Meister Eckhart, which are studied by Marialucrezia Leone and Nadia Bray respectively. For Godfrey, the human being can be considered morally responsible for his own behaviour insofar as he controls his acts by freely using his (free) intellect and his (free) will. The freedom of both, intellect and will, is the essential condition for morally relevant acts. Completely different is Eckhart's doctrine. According to him, freedom is to be interpreted as the detachment from any determination and consequently as the expression of the intellectual nature of the human being. In the light of her study, Bray concludes the following by confirming the interpretation of Eckhart's doctrine and sources commonly shared by scholarly literature: far from being influenced by the Aristotelian tradition, Eckhart follows in the steps Platonic and Stoic moral philosophy. The Stoic moral doctrine, together with Avicbron's metaphysics, is the basis upon which Eckhart develops his own idea about human freedom.

The object of Guy Guldentops' study, the last one of this volume, is Julius Sirenius' antifatalist controversy, which departs from quite an opposite perspective. Sirenius reproaches Pomponazzi's De fato for being «a feeble endorsement of Stoic determinism that cannot be harmonized with the "true" dogmas of divine providence and human free will». Thus, Sirenius strongly criticises Pomponazzi's arguments in favour of Stoic determinism and, following Alexander of Aphrodisias, defends the idea that the essence of human beings expresses itself in freedom.

The essays offered in this volume examine authors and texts from Late Antiquity to Early Modern thought, taking not only the Greek and Latin tradition into consideration, but also works written in the vernacular languages (see, for example, the articles by Rubino, Rapisarda, Ricklin and Bray). The contributions generally follow the chronology of the authors and texts considered within the two thematic sections mentioned above. The only exception is the first essay, by Thomas Ricklin, that opens the volume. Thomas Ricklin, authoritative scholar of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, professor in Munich at the Ludwig Maximilian Universität and Director of the Seminar für Philosophie und Geistesgeschichte in der Renaissance, passed away on September 23, 2016. The contribution published in this volume is Thomas Ricklin's last work. Therefore, we want to dedicate this volume to our dear late friend and colleague.

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