

Is Human Freedom an Illusion?

A critical discussion between the current neurophysiologically deterministic interpretation and Martin Luther's theologically deterministic interpretation

MA Tianji & CHEN Szu-Chin

(the East Asia Forum of the Institute for Religion and Culture, Giessen)

Abstract: Without doubt, Gerhard Roth belongs to a group of contemporary prominent neuroscientists in continental Europe who argue for a deterministic interpretation of brain science findings. In their opinion, mental phenomena can be completely traced back to biological-neuronal processes. The human being is completely determined in his behavior - a claim that arouses highly theological and philosophical interest. Is human freedom an illusion? The Western theological and philosophical tradition has also always been aware of the difficulty of the problem of freedom. A paradigmatic impulse was provided by the Reformer Martin Luther with his doctrine of the unfree will, which he develops above all in the occasional pamphlet *De servo arbitrio* ("On the Bondage of the Will"). The Reformation theological tradition around Luther made the limitedness of the freedom of the human will the core statement of its theological program. The present paper endeavors to reconstruct and analyze the concerns and argumentation of the two authors in order to bring them into conversation with each other in a synthetic step. This paper shows that despite the superficial similarity in word choice and logical operation, the two approaches are fundamentally different. Not only did Luther argue in his historical context for a specific *theological* determinism due to human sinfulness in the face of God-relationship, which has nothing in common with a naturalistic paradigm. He also lays the foundation in his writings - contrary to Roth's abstract philosophical definition - for a differentiated, balanced, holistic concept of freedom in the Reformation tradition, which can be enriching and inspiring for us today.

Keywords: Martin Luther, *De servo arbitrio*, Freedom of Will, Determinism, Dialogue between Science and Theology.

Authors: MA Tianji holds a doctorate in chemistry (Frankfurt am Main; Germany). After studying Philosophy at Uni Hagen (M. A.; Germany) and Protestant theology at FTH Giessen (M. Th.; Germany), he is currently a doctoral student at KiHo Wuppertal (Germany) and a visiting lecturer at Lutheran Seminary in Taiwan. Email: tianji.ma1309@gmail.com

CHEN Szu-Chin studied history in Taiwan (M. A.) and Protestant theology at Ruhr University Bochum (M. Th.; Germany). Both jointly direct the East Asia Forum of the Institute for Religion and Culture (Giessen). Email: sarih12@gmail.com

1. Motivation and introduction

Freedom is an ambiguous phenomenon⁽¹⁾: It is undoubtedly a part of man's essential experience that he experiences himself as free; if he is not subject to any external or internal compulsion, he attributes his actions to the self-determination of his own will. Beyond this self-experience, man is at the same time aware that his decisions

(1) Eberhard Schockhoff, "Wie frei ist der Mensch? Zum Dialog zwischen Hirnforschung und theologischer Ethik," in Christof Gestrich / Thomas Wabel, eds., *Freier oder unfreier Wille? Handlungsfreiheit und Schuldfähigkeit in Dialog der Wissenschaften*, (Berlin: Wichern, 2005), 53; Eberhard Schockhoff, *Beruhet die Willensfreiheit auf einer Illusion? Hirnforschung und Ethik im Dialog*, (Basel: Schwabe, 2004), 23-25.

of will depend on a multitude of inner and outer factors (desires, instincts, environmental influences, external expectations, and social role patternsect.).⁽²⁾ How free is man actually?

Due to rapid progress, neuroscience can distinguish more and more specific structures and functional processes in the brain and assign areas of neuronal activity in the brain to mental phenomena.⁽³⁾ In this context, Gerhard Roth⁽⁴⁾ belongs to a group of prominent contemporary neuroscientists in continental Europe who argue for a deterministic interpretation of brain science findings. They believe mental phenomena can be completely traced back to biological-neuronal processes. Man is completely determined in his behavior - a claim that arouses highly theological and philosophical interest. So is human freedom an illusion?⁽⁵⁾

The Western theological and philosophical tradition has also always been aware of the difficulty of the problem of freedom.⁽⁶⁾ A paradigmatic impulse was provided by the Reformer Martin Luther with his doctrine of the unfree will, which he developed, prompted by disputes with Erasmus of Rotterdam, above all in the occasional pamphlet *De servo arbitrio* ("On the Bondage of the Will").⁽⁷⁾ The theological tradition of Reformation around Luther made the limitedness of the freedom of the human will the core statement of its theological program. To what extent can Luther's teaching be brought into a critical dialogue on freedom with modern neuroscience? And in general: what does a Christian answer to the problem how freedom looks like, and what constructive contribution can it make in an interdisciplinary discussion? This paper aims to shed light on these above questions by reconstructing, analyzing, and discussing the different positions in an interdisciplinary way. In particular, the core thesis of some neuroscientists that human freedom is an illusion will be critically examined based on a biblical-theological discussion oriented to Luther.

At first step of the following, the naturalistic-deterministic position of the neuroscientist Gerhard Roth is exemplarily presented in his argumentation with a preliminary critique. In a second step a presentation of Luther's conception of (un)freedom in a discussion of his work *De servo arbitrio* will be given with a subsequent

(2) Eberhard Schockenhoff, *Theologie der Freiheit*, (Freiburg: Herder, 2007), 33-34; Eberhard Schockenhoff, "Das Netz ist zerrissen – Der Beitrag des Glaubens zum Verhältnis der Freiheit," in Thomas Fuchs / Grit Schwarzkopf, eds., *Verantwortlichkeit – nur eine Illusion?* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2010), 295-297.

(3) Wolfgang Achtner, *Willensfreiheit in Theologie und Neurowissenschaften: Ein historisch-systematischer Wegweiser*, (Darmstadt: WGB, 2010), 288-290.; Wolfgang Achtner, *Dialog Theologie & Naturwissenschaft*, <https://www.theologie-naturwissenschaften.de/startseite/leitartikelarchiv/willensfreiheit/>, 2019-06-14; Peter Bieri, *Das Handwerk der Freiheit. Über die Entdeckung des eigenen Willens*, 8th Edition (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2007), 25-27.

(4) Gerhard Roth, *Über den Menschen*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2021); Gerhard Roth, *Wie das Gehirn die Seele macht*, (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2014); Gerhard Roth, "Worüber dürfen Hirnforscher reden – und in welcher Weise," in Christian Geyer ed., *Hirnforschung und Willensfreiheit: Zur Deutung der neuesten Experimente*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004), 66-88; Gerhard Roth, *Aus Sicht des Gehirns: Vollständig überarbeitete Neuauflage*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009); Gerhard Roth, *Das Gehirn und seine Wirklichkeit: Kognitive Neurobiologie und ihre philosophischen Konsequenzen*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996); Gerhard Roth, *Fühlen, Denken – Wie das Gehirn unser Verhalten steuert*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003); Gerhard Roth, "Willensfreiheit und Schuldfähigkeit aus Sicht der Hirnforschung," in Christof Gestrich / Thomas Wabel eds., *Freier oder unfreier Wille? Handlungsfreiheit und Schuldfähigkeit in Dialog der Wissenschaften*, (Berlin: Wichern, 2005), 37-52.

(5) Cf. also Ulrich Eibach, *Gott im Gehirn? Ich – eine Illusion? Neurobiologie, religiöses Erleben und Menschenbild aus christlicher Sicht*, (Wuppertal: SCM, 2006).

(6) Faced with the antinomy between freedom and necessity, Immanuel Kant, for example, developed a practical-moral concept of freedom that establishes human dignity.

(7) Martin Luther, "De servo arbitrio," in *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, (Weimar: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt Graz, 1908), XVIII, 600-787.

systematization of his biblical-theological perspective of the problem of freedom. A critical discussion brings both positions into an interdisciplinary conversation and gives a final conclusion.

2. Gerhard Roth: Human Freedom as an Illusion

2.1 Roth and his neuroscientifically deterministic position

Gerhard Roth belongs to a group of prominent contemporary neuroscientists, such as Wolf Singer⁽⁸⁾, Wolfgang Prinz⁽⁹⁾, who advocate a deterministic interpretation of brain science findings. According to this, mental phenomena can be traced back without gaps to neuronal processes. In his essay “Willensfreiheit und Schuldfähigkeit aus Sicht der Hirnforschung” (“Free will and guilt from the point of view of brain research”), Roth questions the free will of humans, whereas “it is the principle of causal causation or continuous determinacy [...] in a gapless cause-effect relationship that prevails in nature.”⁽¹⁰⁾

In his argument, Roth initially recognizes that man feels free in a specific form of actions, namely acts of will or arbitrariness. Two kinds of content characterize this feeling:

“(1) As conscious thinking and acting beings, we are the source of our will and the cause of our actions. (2) Under identical conditions, we could also act differently or, in retrospect, could have acted differently if we only wanted or had wanted to (this is called alternativism).”⁽¹¹⁾

Roth sees four problems in such a “strong” or “alternative” concept of free will: firstly, the feeling of being free-willed does not necessarily imply that free will actually exists; secondly, free will should not be confused with a will as a mental state of experience which does not have the unconscious external and internal factors (i.e. “conditionality”) to man; thirdly, an act of will does not necessarily lead to action and vice versa, i.e. there is no compelling connection between a willful act and an action of will; fourthly, the claim that free will is based on the indeterminacy of quantum mechanics is not convincing, since the relevant neuronal events that are influenced by quantum effects occur many orders of magnitude below the level of behaviorally relevant events.⁽¹²⁾

For his argumentation Roth refers to experimental-psychological findings, which are interpreted strictly under the macrophysically valid causal law. As a paradigmatic example, he refers to the experiments carried out in the 1980s by the neurobiologist Benjamin Libet, which showed that the so-called readiness potential (RP)

(8) Peter Singer, „Heute weiß ich weniger über das Gehirn, als ich vor 20 Jahren zu wissen glaubte,“ in ed. Matthias Eckoldt, *Kann das Gehirn das Gehirn verstehen?* (Heidelberg: Carl-Auer-Verlag, 2013); Peter Singer, “Vorschaltungen legen uns fest: Wir sollen aufhören, von Freiheit zu sprechen,” in: Christian Geyer ed., *Hirnforschung und Willensfreiheit. Zur Deutung der neuesten Experimente*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004); Peter Singer, *Vom Gehirn zum Bewusstsein*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004).

(9) Wolfgang Prinz, “Der Mensch ist nicht frei: Ein Gespräch,” in Christian Geyer ed., *Hirnforschung und Willensfreiheit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004), 20-22; Wolfgang Prinz, “Kritik des freien Willens,” in Helmut Fink / Rainer Rosenzweig eds., *Freier Wille – frommer Mensch: Gehirn und Willensfreiheit*, (Paderborn: mentis, 2006).

(10) Roth, *Willensfreiheit*, p. 37.

(11) Roth, *Willensfreiheit*, p. 37.

(12) Roth, *Hirnforscher*, p. 76. For a philosophical-quantum-physical debate see Roth, *Fühlen*, pp. 494-496.

preceding a bodily movement occurs on average temporally before the decision of the will.⁽¹³⁾ Roth sees in these empirical findings evidence that unconscious factors (in Libet's case: RP) exist in humans that massively doubt the concept of free will.

According to Roth, it is indisputable that people experience themselves as free in certain respects, e.g., in conscious deliberation processes, which Roth calls the *phenomenon of self-attribution*: "Characteristic of acts of will is the compelling feeling that *we* are the ones controlling our actions."⁽¹⁴⁾ This phenomenon can be explained in particular by mechanisms of association psychology, which deceptively constructs a causal relationship between desire, will and action by a regular sequence (desires - intentions, plans, states of will - implementation of action). In contrast, people are not aware of the many intermediate steps in the realization of the wish, the processes between the "push of the will and the complicated activation of the many muscles":⁽¹⁵⁾ "What we experience in the volitional realization of a desire is a conscious, abbreviated *image* or *model* of the multiple neurobiological and muscular events."⁽¹⁶⁾

Roth's central objection to a strong, alternative concept of free will is the necessary assumption of *vis mentalis* (lit. "mental power"), for which there is no plausible evidence other than the self-perception of free will (that is problematic as mentioned above).⁽¹⁷⁾ The assumption of a "freely deciding" conscious self is not compatible with the latest findings of neuroscience and psychology. Instead, brain research has shown that not a single conscious self but "completely different states associated with self-consciousness"⁽¹⁸⁾ are involved in conscious decisions and that in addition unconscious processes also play a decisive role. According to developmental and personality psychology, the foundations of personality formation about behavior would already be formed in the first years of life and solidify with increasing age. Therefore, according to Roth, conscious and unconscious decisions can be traced back to biological-neuronal processes, thus only conveying the *illusion of freedom*. While people give reasons for their actions, ultimately, they are determined; what differentiates them is only the origin of the variables that determine the brain which includes all genetic predispositions, socio-cultural influences, conscious and unconscious learning processes:

"All available empirical evidence tells us [...] that these processes of deliberation, however complicated, always take place within the framework of genetic prescriptions, early childhood

(13) Vgl. Benjamin Libet, *Mind Time: Wie das Gehirn Bewusstsein produziert*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005), 623-642; to Libet's own, much more reserved interpretation of his experiments see Benjamin Libet, "Haben wir einen freien Willen?," in Christian Geyer ed., *Hirnforschung und Willensfreiheit: Zur Deutung der neuesten Experimente*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004), 209-211. For alternative interpretations of Libet's experiment, which contradict Roth's deterministic position, and for criticism concerning the experimental design and framework, which questions the validity of the experiment, it is to be referred to the following literatures: Geert Keil, *Willensfreiheit* (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2007), 172-174.; Helmut Mayer, "Ach, das Gehirn – über einige neue neurowissenschaftliche Publikationen," in: Christian Geyer ed., *Hirnforschung und Willensfreiheit. Zur Deutung der neuesten Experimente*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004), 205-217; Peter Hacker, *Die philosophischen Grundlagen der Neurowissenschaften*, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft (wbg), 2010), 302-312. The experiment was repeated with some experimental-technical optimizations by P. Haggard and M. Eimer: Patrick Haggard & M. Eimer, "On the relation between brain potentials and the awareness of voluntary movements," in *Experimental Brain Research* 126 (1999), 128-133.

(14) Roth, *Willensfreiheit*, p. 41; cf. John Searle, *Geist: Eine Einführung*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 2006).

(15) Roth, *Willensfreiheit*, p. 41.

(16) Roth, *Willensfreiheit*, p. 41; the complex neurobiological basis of self-attribution is explained in detail in other works (Roth, *Fühlen*, pp. 196-198 and pp. 430-432; see also Sarah Jayne Blakemore et al., "Abnormalities in the awareness of action," in *Trends Cogn Sci* 6(6) (2002), 237-242.

(17) Roth, *Willensfreiheit*, pp. 42-43.

(18) Roth, *Willensfreiheit*, p. 45.

experiences, and other social influences, and in the alternativist sense, there is no moment of actual freedom anywhere.”⁽¹⁹⁾

The subjective human feeling of being free is thus nothing but an illusionary deception; man is wholly determined in his behavior.⁽²⁰⁾

From the experimental psychological findings, he draws far-reaching conclusions about the accountability or guilt of human beings. In his view, those individuals who “lack insight into their wrongdoing due to brain damage” and whose organismic “functional architecture does not allow for appropriate behavior” should not be punished.⁽²¹⁾ Singer, who also argues for a deterministic interpretation of brain and neuroscientific brain research, emphasizes that judging people with problematic behavioral dispositions as bad or evil means nothing else “than evaluating the result of a fateful development of the organ that constitutes our being.”⁽²²⁾ Based on this new view of accountability and responsibility, Roth concludes that the practice of jurisprudence requires profound reform: the retributive purpose of punishment, which is based on the alternative ability to act differently, should be rejected in favor of the purposes of deterrence or rehabilitation of the offender.⁽²³⁾ People should answer for their deeds without being guilty of them; instead of the previous sentence of imprisonment, the focus should be on educating the offender in a clinic or therapy.⁽²⁴⁾

“By the way, we conclude that although people are *not* responsible for their actions in the *moral* sense, they can be educated to be accountable by having parents, school, or society help them form certain personality traits that enable them to engage in deliberative decision-making behavior.”⁽²⁵⁾

2.2 Reflexion: Neurophysiological determinism in philosophical architecture

The current debate on freedom is strongly influenced by life sciences, which focus on domain-specific variants of determinism, primarily genetic and neurophysiological.⁽²⁶⁾ In this context, Gerhard Roth, as a biologist and brain researcher, is among the prominent representatives who advocate the model of neurophysiological naturalistic-reductive determinism.

(19) Roth, *Willensfreiheit*, p. 44. Wolf Singer expresses it even more sophisticatedly: “The variables of conscious decisions primarily consist of *late-learned* elements: articulated cultural knowledge, ethical principles, laws, discourse rules, and agreed-upon behavioral norms.” In contrast, *early-existing* strategies for weighing options, evaluations and implicit knowledge, entered the brain due to genetic predispositions, the early childhood experiences or unconscious learning processes, have always unconsciously influenced decisions. (Singer, *Vorschaltungen*, p. 59).

(20) Singer succinctly expresses: “No one can be other than he is.” (Singer, *Vorschaltungen*, p. 63).

(21) Roth, *Willensfreiheit*, pp. 46-47; cf. Singer, *Vorschaltungen*, pp. 63-64.

(22) Wolf Singer, *Vorschaltungen*, p. 63.

(23) In addition, the protection of society from incorrigible offenders should be ensured.

(24) Roth, *Sicht*, pp. 181-182.

(25) Roth, *Willensfreiheit*, 47; see also: Michael Pauen & Gerhard Roth, *Freiheit, Schuld und Verantwortung: Grundzüge einer naturalistischen Theorie der Willensfreiheit*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2008), 13-15.

(26) Apart from a metaphysical, comprehensive, universal determinism, there are several so-called area determinisms (neurobiological, psychological, social, historical, and cultural determinism), which mostly start from the beginning in a limited way. It could be the case that the world is partially determined, but in other parts outside the domain in question, it is not. For example, one could assume that the human brain is a wholly determined system. In contrast, the answer to whether the world is fundamentally determined at the micro level, is left open. In his argumentation, Roth makes a powerfully comprehensive, universal claim to truth about the world.

Philosophically, the problem of freedom and determinism is to be located in the area of the philosophy of mind. Thereby it can be differentiated between two partial questions: The more classical of the two problems refers to an either-or question (“freedom or determinism?”). Its unambiguous answer leads either to the stubborn defense of freedom and denial of determinism or vice versa.⁽²⁷⁾ The second part of the complex question concerns the problem of compatibility, i.e., the question of whether freedom and determinism exclude each other. It is evident that in case of a negative answer to the second part of the question, the classical problem of the first part dissolves. On closer examination, the following standard positions emerge:

	freedom of will		
Determinism		will is not free	will is free
	Reality det.	Determinism	Compatibilism
	Reality indet.		Libertarianism

Numerous philosophers hold a compatibilist position concerning the compatibility of determinism and free will. It claims that free will and determinism are compatible, which means free will could be real even if reality were deterministic. In this case, a *complementary* concept is present: both real elements are on different, not mutually exclusive levels, which refer to each other and can be valid. The opposite thesis is the so-called incompatibilism. In this case, either the free will is an illusion with a deterministic interpretation (hard determinism), or the free will is real with a non-deterministic assumption of reality (libertarianism). It is a *competitive* concept in which both aspects are on the same level; if one aspect is facilitated, the other must give way.⁽²⁸⁾

In the context of recent findings and insights into brain research and the psychology of action, Roth denies the existence of human free will. His position thus belongs to the naturalistic-deterministic paradigm. For him, two premises seem to be crucial important:

- (1) There is no difference between the spirituality and the (neuronal)materiality: the spirituality of man and thus his being-free can be regarded as the result of emergent movements explainable by evolutionary biology; the conviction of being free represents an essential brain performance for the development and adaptability of man which can be unmasked as a deception;⁽²⁹⁾
- (2) There is no (philosophically relevant) difference between *causes* and *reasons*; reasons are nothing else than the conscious, *internal* experiential form of brain processes, which in neurobiological view

(27) Geert Keil, *Willensfreiheit*, (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2007), 10-11.

(28) The terminological distinction made, the opposition of compatibilism and incompatibilism, is still prevalent today, but it is also often criticized. This sweeping stenciling suggests the possibility of categorizing *all* philosophical concepts according to a logically exhaustive classification criterion. The collective designations conceal a variety of highly diverse ideas. Moreover, outsider positions that do not fit into the categorizations are not sufficiently considered. Another crucial weakness is that both camps, the incompatibilists, and the compatibilists, use the same choice of words (“freedom” and “determinism”) but do not operate with terms of the same quality. Indeed, many incompatibilists use a more robust concept of freedom and determinism. Thus, in the first step, it is crucial to explain what is meant by freedom or free action and which category of freedom is to be tested for its compatibility with determinism (Keil, *Willensfreiheit*, 12).

(29) Roth, *Willensfreiheit*, pp. 43-44.

express themselves as a complex concatenation of neurophysiological events, ultimately represent causes (“*external aspect*”)⁽³⁰⁾; “We act from causes, but we explain this action with reasons.”⁽³¹⁾

The radical demand of some neuroscientists like Roth to expose human free will as an inscrutable self-deception, i.e., to interpret ethically relevant actions as non-personal, no responsible authorship attributable, and neuronal processes, can be countered by various counterarguments from a philosophical perspective. In the context of the philosophical theory of action, the distinction between cause and reason developed by Plato should be noted, which is illustrated in the *Phaedo* using the Socrates example (see Platon, Phaidon 98d.):

To the question: ‘Why did Socrates not escape from prison?’ two types of answers are conceivable: The first type of answer (A) is: Because his sinews and bones did not move. It asks for the causes that explain why Socrates did not escape from prison, like any other event in the physical world. The second type (B), on the other hand, explores the reasons that moved Socrates [...]: because he wanted to follow his Daimonion and obey the laws of the state.⁽³²⁾

Human actions are *determined* by reasons, but not *caused* by them. The structure of their intentionality distinguishes reasons from causes: “People act for the sake of the goals they want to achieve through their actions. However, a recognized and consciously chosen goal does not ‘cause’ their actions, for they are left with the option of acting otherwise.”⁽³³⁾ While physical processes are causally determined, human beings are free insofar as they could act differently for a given reason.

A further criticism is directed at the unexplained premises of the naturalistic-reductionist fundamental ontology. Unproblematic is an *epistemological* reductionism, according to which brain and neuroscientific investigations expose the neuronal correlates of human mental processes but can neither prove nor disprove the independence of the mental in terms of its being.⁽³⁴⁾ The *correlation* must not be confused with the *causation*; the epistemological reductionism must not pass to the *ontological* reductionism (naturalism). Reducing personal actions and beliefs to univocal notions of neuronal events ultimately leads to the dissolution of a complex structure of actions and the underlying idea of a person present in his actions and his life history.⁽³⁵⁾ If the cognitive performances of humans can be transferred entirely into neuronal processes, the subject and the phenomenon of acting and thus the question of ethics are already eliminated by choice of such a scientific language of description.

Also, the reductionistic-physicalistic programmatic shows internal contradictions, which lead to determinism’s impracticability. A scientific theory claiming to explain mental phenomena exclusively from neuronal facts denies its basis: It is a mental phenomenon. An approach that eliminates the mental consciousness of man, destroys its presuppositions. If argumentation and rational consideration do not come to an independent reality, the attempt to convince dissenters is useless. What we think and mean is not owed to well-founded insight but to differently developed brain activities.

(30) Roth, *Hirnforscher*, pp. 66-68.

(31) Roth, *Hirnforscher*, p. 82.

(32) Schockenhoff, *Mensch*, p. 56.

(33) Eberhard Schockenhoff, *Beruhet die Willensfreiheit auf einer Illusion? Hirnforschung und Ethik im Dialog*, (Basel: Schwabe-Verlag 2004), p. 16; cf. Schockenhoff, *Mensch*, p. 56.

(34) Schockenhoff, *Willensfreiheit*, pp. 17-18.

(35) Schockenhoff, *Mensch*, p. 57.

It is interesting to embed the contemporary discussion of freedom, triggered by the ideological advance of naturalism, in a synchronic interdisciplinary and diachronic larger intellectual and ideological historical context. A detailed discussion of the comprehensive subject matter is beyond the scope of this paper. This paper aims to draw on Luther's understanding of freedom as a paradigmatic theological perspective in a critical dialogue.

3. Martin Luther: "On the Bondage of the Will"

3.1 Luther and his theologically deterministic position

Luther develops the concept of (un)free will in his writing "On the Bondage of the Will", which is prompted by a dispute with Erasmus of Rotterdam in the interest of the doctrine of justification. His response turns out to be both systematic-theological and polemical. This polemical and sharp tone becomes understandable when one considers the importance Luther attached to the subject:

"It is not irreligious, then, nor curious, nor superfluous, but it is most of all useful and necessary to a Christian, to know whether the will does anything, or nothing, in the matter of salvation. Indeed, to tell the truth, this is the very hinge of our disputation — the very question at issue turns upon it. We are occupied in discussing what the free will does, what the free will allows, and what its proportion is to the grace of God."⁽³⁶⁾

Luther's writing shows more at stake here than just a theological disputation. For Luther, essential statements of the Christian faith relate to the question of free will, which he does not want to drop under any circumstances. What is at stake here is nothing less than the certainty of salvation, which is closely connected with justification:

"But now, God has taken my salvation out of the hands of my own will and received it into his own hands. He has promised to save me, not by my own work or running, but by His own grace and mercy. I am therefore at ease and certain, because He is faithful and will not lie to me; and moreover, because He is great and powerful, so that no number of devils, no number of adversities, can either wear Him out, or pluck me out of his hand."⁽³⁷⁾

Erasmus' understanding of the ambiguity of Scripture⁽³⁸⁾ in specific passages causes him to be indecisive in his Diatribe regarding God's grace and man's free will. Although Erasmus shows what man's free will is capable of and what God's grace does, free will can exert itself at one time, and at another time, it is ineffective without

(36) Luther, *De servo arbitrio*, p. 614: „Igitur non est irreligiosum, curiosum aut supervacaneum, sed imprimis salutare et necessarium Christiano, nosse, an voluntas aliquid vel nihil agat in iis, quae pertinent ad salutem. Imo ut scias, hic est cardo nostrae disputationis, hic versatur status causae huius. Nam hoc agimus, ut disquiramus, quid nam possit liberum arbitrium, quid patiatur, quo modo se habeat ad gratiam Dei. Haec si ignoraverimus, prorsus nihil Christianarum rerum, noscemus, erimusque omnibus gentibus peiores.“

(37) Luther, *De servo arbitrio*, p. 783: „At nunc cum Deus salute meam extra meum arbitrium tollens in suum receperit, et non meo opera aut cursu, sed sua gratia et misericordia promiserit me servare, securus et certus sum, quod ille fidelis sit et mihi non mentietur, tum potens et magnus, ut nulli daemones, nullae adversitates eum frangere aut me illi rapere poterunt.“

(38) Contrary to Erasmus's assertion that the Holy Scriptures contain dark passages and thus do not allow for "firm assertions", Luther argues that this is entirely clear. According to him, the deepest mysteries of God's majesty are made available to all the public in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The individual difficulties of the Scriptures are not factual but grammatical.

grace.⁽³⁹⁾ Therefore, Luther sees a severe inconsistency in Erasmus' argumentation. Since the argument about free will is relevant to salvation, according to Luther, it is important for Christian to know that God foreknows, decides, and accomplishes all things in the light of his immutable, eternal, and infallible will. For Luther, God's unchanging foreknowledge is related to all events' necessity (*necessitas*). Erasmus strongly opposes this since it would deprive man of the freedom of choice. On the other hand, Luther tries to demonstrate why the latter missed the core statements of the Holy Scriptures.⁽⁴⁰⁾

In another section, Luther specifies his understanding of the unfree will and absolute necessity (*necessitas absoluta*). Obviously, Luther does not mean that man is forced to do something, but that it is part of the nature of man to do evil. Man does therein according to his will with pleasure. However, man can't stop this willingness with his strength; in this one-sidedness of the will, man is trapped. On the other hand, when God works in man, man's will is transformed; this will acts freely and is not forced. Thus, it is about man's inability to turn away from his evil nature out of his strength and to turn to God.⁽⁴¹⁾

In this context, Luther uses the image of the riding animal and the two riders. The mount wants what its rider wants. The two riders, i.e., God and Satan, fight with each other to possess it. At this point, Luther, from his point of view, seizes on a central weakness of Erasmus. Also Erasmus cannot see man's free will as entirely sovereign but gives so much room to God's grace that the power of free will can be regarded as relatively small and becomes ineffective without grace.⁽⁴²⁾ Luther makes the critical inquiry: Where is the power of free will if the grace of God is absent? For Luther, Erasmus is absurd in his conclusion. According to Luther, free will could at best be regarded as man's ability to be seized by God's Spirit and to be filled with God's grace. This is contained in man's creatureliness.⁽⁴³⁾ Free will, as such is something that only belongs to God as a *predicate*:

“It stands fixed, even by your own testimony, therefore, that we do all things by necessity, and nothing by freewill, so long as the power of the free will is nothing, and neither does nor can do good, in the absence of grace [...]. It follows from what has been said, that freewill is a title which altogether belongs to God, and cannot join with any other being, save the Divine Majesty.”⁽⁴⁴⁾

In Luther's theological anthropology, no one can improve his life, i.e., man is from himself not capable of anything good unless the Holy Spirit works it in him. It becomes clear that Luther equates the existence of human free will with human pride, i.e., the possibility of trusting in one's abilities.⁽⁴⁵⁾

But Luther acknowledges man's free will in things that are subject to him. Here he makes a fundamental distinction between two categories, *superiora* and *inferiora*: While people cannot dispose of the realm of *superiora*, i.e., the purely divine realm (specifically: “God-relationship”), they are granted a certain degree of freedom of choice in the domain of *inferiora*, the realm of the worldly (“everyday freedom”).⁽⁴⁶⁾ In the latter case,

(39) Luther, *De servo arbitrio*, pp. 614-615.

(40) Luther, *De servo arbitrio*, pp. 615-617.

(41) Luther, *De servo arbitrio*, pp. 634-635.

(42) Luther, *De servo arbitrio*, pp. 635, 646-647.

(43) Luther, *De servo arbitrio*, p. 636.

(44) Luther, *De servo arbitrio*, p. 636: “At nunc cum Deus salute meam extra meum arbitrium tollens in suum receperit, et non meo opera aut cursu, sed sua gratia et misericordia promiserit me servare, securus et certus sum, quod ille fidelis sit et mihi non mentietur, tum potens et magnus, ut nulli daemones, nullae adversitates eum frangere aut me illi rapere poterunt.”

(45) Luther, *De servo arbitrio*, p. 634.

(46) Luther, *De servo arbitrio*, pp. 638-639.

man has a free will, which is manifested in the handling of property and possessions. Soteriologically of essential importance, however, it is not the latter question of freedom of choice or action in life but the former question of freewill.

In his further argumentation against the diatribe of Erasmus, Luther turns to the definition of free will, the exact explanation of which he misses in Erasmus.⁽⁴⁷⁾ According to Luther, the term “free will” in the proper sense means that man can behave as he wishes against God and is bound neither to law nor to command. Luther argues that from the “willing” of free will it results inevitably an ability, i.e., that man with free will can just a little fulfill the law and believe the Gospel. It is precisely in this context that Luther names the already indicated main argument against Erasmus’ argumentation: even Erasmus must admit that grace is indispensable to any willing and performing;⁽⁴⁸⁾ at the same time the latter cites a passage from Jesus Sirach 15:14-16 to prove the contrary view that free can strive for something good according to the commandments of God without grace.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Therein lies the major inconsistency that Luther seeks to expose in Erasmus. Luther’s point, however, is not to deny that man has no will but to point out that man’s will is evil and cannot correspond at all to the will of God. Again and again, the Diatribe of Erasmus paints the picture of a man who can do what he is commanded or at least recognizes that he cannot. Such a person, according to Luther, does not exist. Satan himself keeps people believing in their abilities because the Scripture portrays man as bound, miserable, imprisoned, sick and dead. Only with false self-confidence does man think to be free, blessed, vital, and alive.

According to Luther, God’s promises also deprive man’s free will of the right to exist; based on these promises, God restores the penitent sinner.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Why some are now touched by these promises, and some are not, so that some accept the offered grace while others despise it, it can only be explained by a hidden will of God (*deus absconditus*). Luther differentiates here between God’s revealed will and hidden will; he emphasizes the unavailability of God following Rom 9:20.⁽⁵¹⁾ Here, human logic fails and has no insight into God’s action. Man should not want to fathom the majesty of God but turn to the incarnate God, Jesus Christ. The hardening of people is based on the secret will of God:

“It also belongs to this incarnate God to weep, wail, and groan over the ruin of the ungodly, although the will of the Majesty, according to His purpose, abandons and rejects some so that they perish. And it is not for us to ask why he acts this way, but rather to worship God with fear and trembling who can and is willing to do such things.”⁽⁵²⁾

Luther does not want to and cannot resolve this tension. It behooves man to worship God and not to inquire into what is not revealed.

Regarding the problem of the origin of evil, Luther uses the example of the hardening of Pharaoh (Ex 7:13, 22; 8:11, 15, 28; 9:7) to show that God should not be considered as initiator of evil. Before the Fall, everything

(47) Luther, *De servo arbitrio*, pp. 651-674.

(48) Luther, *De servo arbitrio*, p. 668.

(49) Luther, *De servo arbitrio*, p. 671.

(50) Luther, *De servo arbitrio*, p. 684.

(51) “But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” (Rom 9:20; ESV).”

(52) Luther, *De servo arbitrio*, p. 689: “Huius itidem Dei incarnati est flere, deplorare, gemere super perditione impiorum, cum voluntas maiestatis ex proposito aliquos selinquat et reprobet, ut pereant. Nec nobis quaerendum, cur ita faciat, sed severendus Deus, qui talia et possit et velit.”

was created by God very well. After the Fall, God only designs from Pharaoh's corrupt nature; He acts in man as He finds him, i.e., God works evil through evil.⁽⁵³⁾ Luther's central argument and key is God's omnipotence. For Luther, the connection of grace with God's almightiness forms the starting point of *theological determinism*. Man is unfree and utterly incapable of contributing anything to his salvation. At the same time, God works everything in everything and, with unalterable necessity, drives all events, good and evil. While Erasmus starts from a positive image of man with the ability to do morally good works,⁽⁵⁴⁾ Luther recognizes the nature of man as evil. According to his very own striving, man is directed toward himself and against God, and thus cannot change it in its necessity (immutability) by his power: "Thus it happens that he constantly and necessarily sins and errs until God's Spirit leads him onto the right path."⁽⁵⁵⁾

3.2 Systematization: Determinism and free will in Christian anthropology

Given Luther's controversial dispute with Erasmus over man's free will, Zickendraht comments:

"This is actually only in the discussion dominating the whole the question of whether a better ego, which recognizes and desires the good, in the natural man can be found, from the point of view of absolute monergism of grace."⁽⁵⁶⁾

While Erasmus starts from a positive image of man, in which he can do morally good works out of himself, Luther concludes on the biblical basis that nothing good or honorable can be found in man who is detached from God. The whole man (*totus homo*) as a sinner is defined as unrighteous, ignorant of God, a despiser of God, deviated and unfit before God. This hostility to God disqualifies man in terms of doing morally good works and participating in the life of God. If it exists at all, free will in this framework is only suitable for sinning.

In this context, At the same time, Luther seems to grant man free will in things that are subject to him. His differentiation between the realms of *superiora* and *inferiora* is ultimately an expression of Luther's two kingdoms doctrine. Soteriologically of importance, Decisive for Luther in *De servo arbitrio*, on the other hand, is only the salvation-relevant question concerning free will in relation to God. Luther struggles for the *theological* (not psychological) truth of whether man can freely dispose of the constitutional conditions of his faith, i.e., make his will itself the object of free choice.⁽⁵⁷⁾ According to Luther, the human active will is directed toward an ultimate purpose, which in man's sinfulness is not God but his sinful ego. The human will is illustrated as a beast of burden, through which God rides the believer and the devil rides the unbeliever:

"Thus, the human will is placed as a sort of packhorse, in the midst of two contending parties. If God has mounted, it wills and goes where God pleases. As the Psalmist [73:22-23] says: 'I have become like a beast of burden, and I am ever with you.' If Satan has mounted, then it wills and goes where

(53) Luther, *De servo arbitrio*, pp. 708-709, 711.

(54) Luther, *De servo arbitrio*, pp. 762.

(55) Luther, *De servo arbitrio*, pp. 753: "Ita fit, ut perpetuo et necessario eccet et erret, donec spiritu Dei corrigatur."

(56) Zickendraht, *Der Streit zwischen Erasmus und Luther über die Willensfreiheit*, (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1909), 136.

(57) Benedikt Bruder, "Versprochene Freiheit: der Freiheitsbegriff der theologischen Anthropologie in interdisziplinärem Kontext," *Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann*, vol.159 (2013), 145-157.

Satan wills. Nor is it in its own choice, which of the two riders it runs to or seeks as its rider; but the riders themselves contend for the acquisition and possession of it.”⁽⁵⁸⁾

From a theological perspective, all of man’s actions rooted in the unfree will are seen as an expression of selfishness and self-interest, whereby man cannot change the overall orientation of his will and actions by his efforts. The genuine turning to God is not within his possible acts of choice; his existential problem does not consist in a not-being-able-to-change, but in a not-being-able-of-*wanting-to-change*, which is not due to external compulsion, but to the inner determination of the sinful will.⁽⁵⁹⁾ From a soteriological perspective, human freedom is denied insofar as a man cannot radically distance himself from the constitutional conditions of his existence and thus cannot dispose of his relationship with God. “Free will” is, for Luther, a predicate of God that overtaxes man, which becomes paradigmatically clear in prehistory:

“It was shown, therefore, in that first man, by a terrible example, for bruising our pride, what our free will can do when left to itself — yes, if he is left to himself and is not continuously guided and encouraged more and more by God’s spirit.”⁽⁶⁰⁾

The divine omnipotence puts man in the position to ceaselessly operate in the primary direction of his (sinful) will.⁽⁶¹⁾ He is therefore exposed to the restless activity of wanting and acting according to the evil nature of his will; the reality of evil cannot be blamed on God but on his instruments: “The fault, therefore, lies in the instruments, which God does not allow to be idle, so that evil happens precisely under God’s impulse, not unlike when a carpenter cuts badly with a serrated and toothed axe.”⁽⁶²⁾

According to Luther, election manifests itself in man’s faith: While election represents the work of God revealed in Christ, the mystery of non-election belongs to the “hidden God” (cf. Isa 45:15) alone. Given the election by grace, man should pass over to the worship of the hidden counsel of God. The emphasis on man’s unfree will is ultimately soteriologically motivated: Only if salvation is founded in God alone, without being dependent on his human efforts, is the certainty of salvation possible.

From a soteriological total perspective, Luther advocates a *theological determinism*: as a creature to be redeemed, man, corrupted and broken in his innermost being, cannot distance from himself, in other words, from his sinful constitutional conditions. Being enslaved by sin means to be enslaved by oneself and to be bent in oneself.⁽⁶³⁾ Human beings must be liberated from the illusion of freedom of will, to which they fruitlessly fixate themselves and their abilities, through the redemptive Gospel that comes from the outside. God must, on His own initiative, break through man’s rebellious resistance and bring redemption against the evil will of human beings. Free will is a attribute of God, whereas human beings are essentially *servum arbitrium*.⁽⁶⁴⁾ Luther’s concern is thus the certainty of salvation: only when the decision about faith or unbelief is not in man’s hands, only then can the believer be certain of his salvation.

(58) Bruder, *Freiheit*, pp. 46-47.

(59) Bruder, *Freiheit*, pp. 94-95, 164-165.

(60) Bruder, *Freiheit*, pp. 164-165.

(61) Eibach, *Gott*, pp. 26-27.

(62) Eibach, *Gott*, 140-141.

(63) Bruder, *Freiheit*, p. 298.

(64) Bruder, *Freiheit*, pp. 300-301.

4. Synthesis - a critical dialogue between Roth and Luther

Superficially, the two deterministic approaches, Roth's neurophysiological determinism and Luther's theological determinism seem to have great similarities. It can be said that both obviously represent an incompatibilist position. In both cases it is a competitive concept in which both factual elements, determinism and free will, are on one and the same level and thus cannot coexist, i.e., are incompatible with each other. If determinism is true, the conclusion follows inevitably that freedom of will cannot exist.

This logical-rational thinking operation undoubtedly shows the great analogy between the two "determinisms", but conceals the substantial differences behind the surface structure. First of all, their writings are to be located concretely in the respective historical contexts with their specific occasions and motivations, which form the starting points of their respective argumentation.

Roth writes against the background of the undeniable success of neuroscience in recent decades and makes comprehensive truth claims about the world and the whole of human existence. With his philosophical assertion that human free will is an illusion, Roth already transcends the limits of single-scientific research and draws very far-reaching conclusions from empirical findings with grave ethical consequences regarding culpability and responsibility. Luther, on the other hand, represented the fundamental concern of the Reformation with regard to the anthropological constitution and certainty of salvation in the occasional treatise *De servo arbitrio*. It was written as a reaction to the humanist doctrine of Erasmus and essentially addresses the fundamental theological question of whether man, in view of the Fall, has the freedom to turn to divine grace by his own power and in this way bring about personal salvation.

In this context, the fundamental difference between the two approaches becomes clear despite their superficial analogy. While Roth moves from some empirical neurophysiological findings to a far-reaching philosophical thesis, Luther's argumentation is essentially theological. The equation or confusion of the two determinisms resembles a serious philosophical Category error. This difference emerges from an analysis of their argumentation insofar as both use partly the same choice of words ("freedom", "determinism" / "necessity"), but do not operate with terms of the same quality. The exact meaning of the terms with their connotated contexts become understandable only in the respective philosophical and theological context. Thus, it is crucial to explicate what is to be understood by "freedom of will" and "determinism" and thus which category of freedom is to be examined for its compatibility with a specific understanding of determinism.

In any case, it is clear that Roth's central criticism is directed against a philosophically "strong" concept of free will. This alternativeism assumes that man could have acted differently under identical conditions in retrospect, if only he had willed differently. Against this specific understanding of freedom as a negative background foil, Roth develops his counterargumentation on the basis of recent empirical neurophysiological findings. His deterministic approach is first a domain-specific, genetic-neurophysiologically dominated determinism variant, which then undergoes an ontological generalization to all areas of life as a philosophical thesis with the ethical implications mentioned above. Luther's position is quite different, since his position is a specific *theological determinism*. He is concerned with an essentially theological insight: Man is the creature to be redeemed, God is the one who brings about redemption. *In this respect*, man does not possess the ability, i.e. the freedom of will, to distance from himself, i. e. from sin. This would presuppose a neutral part of the person, exempt from sin, which could then decide, as it were, against sin and for God. Luther does not know such a creatureliness; the creature is to be called a sinner in his innermost being. To be enslaved by sin is

thus also to be enslaved by oneself and to be bent in oneself. Consequently, salvation must come to man from outside, in the preaching of the Law and the Gospel. Otherwise, man does not become free from the illusion of this freedom, in which he fixes (in vain) on himself and his own capacity. According to Luther, God must bring about salvation *against the* evil will of man. Free will is a predicate of God, not of man as *servum arbitrium*.

In *De servo arbitrio*, the impression is sometimes given that Luther's theological determinism experiences a metaphysical expansion in this intensification of God's omnipotence: all events, i.e. not only salvation events, but also all calamities, as well as actions or other processes that may be indifferent to the question of salvation, are grounded in God's immutable will; everything that happens is necessarily in accordance with God's will. Luther's concern here, however, remains a theological and pastoral one: whatever happens, the believer may know himself secure in the fact that God holds everything in his hands.

In addition to these fundamental differences between Luther and Roth, it also becomes clear that Luther already lays the foundation for a holistic, differentiated concept of freedom in *De servo arbitrio* (and in other writings such as *De libertate christiana* (On the Freedom of a Christian)). Thus, a Christian theological understanding of freedom cannot be satisfied with taking human freedom in a reductionist way as an abstract being able to act differently in relation to alternative possibilities. Consequently, Luther's aforementioned differentiation between the realm of *superiora* and *inferiora*, which does grant human beings a limited creaturely freedom, is important. A good reflective balanced theology in the Reformation tradition can protect against one-sided aggravation and prevent falling off one side of the horse or the other.

Luther and his Reformation theology knew about - obviously for completely different reasons than neurophysiology - the limitedness of human freedom; a concept of freedom in the sense of *autonomy*, the unrestricted self-determination of man over his physical, mental, spiritual and social life and thus also his actions is always denied. Thus, Reformation theology distances itself from genuine philosophy of the subject, such as Kant. On the other hand, contrary to a neurophysiological determinism of Roth, man as a person, as an acting subject of freedom, is *not eliminated*—despite all the emphasis on the creaturely limitation of freedom and the unfreedom in sin. Rather, even the bondage in sin is produced by a subject as an expression of man's spirituality. Finally, enslavement under sin, which requires liberation on the part of God (theological determinism), has nothing in common ontologically with a naturalistic determinism, which, by assuming a causally closed system, must necessarily lead to the exclusion of the subject, his freedom and ability to shape his life. Consequently, the Christian understanding of freedom is incompatible with naturalistic determinism that Roth advocates.

Beyond these demarcations, the Christian concept of freedom opens up a new perspective of human freedom. Despite human striving for absolute autonomy and subsequent lapse into self-centeredness, sin, man can be liberated to freedom through an initiative intervention on the part of God. In theological terms, this process must be thought of as a dialogical event through which man responds to the call of divine love and grace. This liberated true freedom is not only freedom *from* self, from sin *to* commitment to God in faith; it is at the same time Spirit-led, practical freedom *for* relationships and charity. True freedom is realized in relationships and in the limits of being dependent on others. From a Christian perspective, then, human freedom is grounded in being addressed by God, in a living bond and relationship with the creative source of one's existence. It is always liberated, given and owed freedom from the bond with Christ, in whose new space of life receiving and granting love becomes possible.

5. Conclusion

Due to the undeniable success of natural science, more and more scientists are appearing in continental Europe as “world interpreters” who make truth claims about the world and the entire human existence with often undifferentiated theses. These include the renowned neurobiologist Gerhard Roth, whose deterministic interpretation of brain and neuroscientific research seeks to expose human freedom as an illusion, leading to a problematic view of human culpability and responsibility. His naturalistic-reductive program is to be regarded critically in its philosophical-worldly expansiveness due to unclarified premises. In an intentioned dialogue with the reformer it turns out that Luther’s determinism, despite the logical-operational and conceptual surface similarity (competitive concept regarding the two factual moments determinism and freedom of will), fundamentally differs from Roth in its questioning and concern. Roth operates in the argumentation with purely (religion-)philosophical terms and concepts, which arise from the question of the compatibility of determinism and freedom within philosophy. Indeed, this question is answered philosophically in very different ways (determinism, compatibilism, libertarianism), but not in such a way that a certain approach to the solution can be seamlessly transferred into the theological question of human freedom of will. Further future work is desirable in this area of interdisciplinary dialogue between theology, philosophy, and natural science.

Luther argues from the biblical-theological perspective that (besides the limitation by his bodily constitution) man’s (un)free will is firstly limited by the sinful human nature. This theological view of the limitation of freedom moves on a completely different ontological level than the naturalistic-deterministic paradigm of biologists, neuroscientists and philosophers. Luther’s “unfree will” is not about a physical or psychological but a theological determination, conditioned by the Fall into the bondage of self-centeredness and not derivable from the empirical natural conditions of life. Man is limited by his Creator, who must by no means be equated with an anonymous and all-life-determining natural causality or the “power of genes”. Otherwise, the individual human being would turn out to be a will-less machine, whose existence in its marionette-like existence without sense, meaning and dignity is absorbed in random mechanical-biological functionalities. Moreover, a Christian understanding of freedom cannot be satisfied with a philosophical conception of human freedom as an abstract ability to act differently in relation to alternative possibilities. Even the self-inflicted lack of freedom in sin is open to God’s liberating action on man, who is enabled to true freedom in faith and in the bond with God.⁽⁶⁵⁾ Man’s bondage to sin is embraced by God’s freedom in salvation.

From a Christian point of view, a naturalistic anthropology of the Roth type, which unjustifiably claims to be able to see through the world in its entirety by reducing all phenomena of this world - including mental phenomena - to scientifically explorable quantities through the absolutization of a naturalistic methodology, clearly falls short. On the other hand, Luther’s original thoughts provide the basis for a balanced, differentiated, holistic concept of freedom that can also be enriching and inspiring for us today.

(65) Rom 8:14ff.; Gal 4:5f.

中文题目:

人类的自由是一种幻觉吗?当代神经生理学决定论与马丁·路德的神学决定论之间的批评性讨论

作者: 马天济拥有德国法兰克福大学化学博士、德国哈根大学哲学硕士和吉森自由神学院神学硕士学位。他目前是德国乌帕塔教会大学的博士生和台湾中华信义宗神学院的访问讲师。陈思瑾拥有台湾辅仁大学历史硕士及德国波鸿鲁尔大学基督教神学硕士学位。两人目前共同投身在德国吉森宗教与文化研究所的东亚论坛。Email: tianji.ma1309@gmail.com; sarih12@gmail.com

提要: 毫无疑问,格哈德·罗斯 (Gerhard Roth) 属于欧陆当代杰出的神经科学家群体,他们透过脑科学研究对人的意志有着新的决定论解释。在他们看来,精神现象完全可追溯到生物神经元过程。人类在其行为中是完全被决定的--这种说法引起了神学和哲学界的高度兴趣。人类的自由是一种幻觉吗?一直以来西方神学和哲学传统也一直意识到自由意志的复杂性。宗教改革家马丁·路德在《论意志的捆绑》(De servo arbitrio) 中提供了不自由意志教义的典范。宗教改革的神学传统把自由意志的有限性作为其神学的核心声明。本文致力于重建和分析这两位作者的关注点和论证,以便使他们在合成步骤中相互对话。本文表明,尽管在选词和逻辑操作上有表面上的相似性,但这两种观点与方法在根本上是完全不同的。路德在他所处的历史框架下主张关乎人类在上帝关系面前的罪性的特定神学决定论,这与自然主义典范毫无共同之处。与罗斯的抽象哲学定义相反,他还在其著作中为宗教改革神学传统奠定了一个有区别的、平衡的、整体的自由概念之基础,这即使对今天的我们来说都极具丰富性与启发性。

关键词: 马丁·路德、《论意志的捆绑》、自由意志、决定论、科学与神学之间的对话