

Implications and Suggestions for Further Studies

Subsequent studies into the world of early Christian ethics, as well as Egyptian Christianity, would be greatly benefited if deterministic systems were not dismissed as polemical exaggerations but instead taken into account as viable options for the forming of ethical and anthropological systems. The nature of the human will, and its necessity in order to attain salvation, continued to be a hotly debated topic in the third and fourth century and the exact nature of the doctrine of free will was still controversial in the fifth century.¹ The Pelagian controversy is an example of this. Pelagius argued for the free will of humans always to choose the good, which was something God had provided. There was no need of further divine grace; salvation was in one's own hands. In portraying their 'opponents', Pelagius' followers painted a similar picture as that which Irenaeus painted of Valentinians:

Anyone who hears that it is not possible for him to be without sin will not even try to be what he judges to be impossible, and the man who does not try to be without sin must perforce sin all the time, and all the more boldly because he enjoys the false security of believing that it is impossible for him not to sin ... But if he were to hear that he is able not to sin, then he would have exerted himself to fulfil what he now knows to be possible when he is striving to fulfil it, to achieve his purpose for the most part, even if not entirely.²

While Irenaeus claimed that Valentinians thought of themselves as naturally saved, the argument is here turned on its head: if all people are sinners without the ability to freely choose the good (a caricature of Augustine's and later Jerome's theology) there would be no use in following any moral code. This argument is, just like Irenaeus' argument against Valentinians, most likely exaggerated for rhetorical effect, but it shows clear similarities in argument. This study has been limited to the time before the fifth century so I will not go into closer comparison between *TriTrac* and the details of the Pelagian controversy. Suffice it to say that a close reading of early Christian views on free will would undoubtedly yield more fruitful results if systems like the one represented in *TriTrac* was included. Augustine's view of the capacity of human free will is at times much closer to what we find in *TriTrac* than, for example, in Origen. Augustine

¹ See for example Burns, "Astrological Determinism".

² *On the Possibility of not Sinning 2* (part of the Caspari corpus). Translation from Brinley R. Rees, *The Letters of Pelagius and His Followers* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1991), 168.

favored a view that highlighted the need for divine grace in order to overcome human propensity to sin, rather than the position that Origen favored, which emphasized the free will of all humans always to choose the good.³ A closer reading of these positions, from the perspective of ancient theories of cognition, would most likely result in a study that recognized the strong similarities between the systems; the nuances that separate determinism and a case for free will in antiquity are, after all, quite subtle. Whatever the case may be with regard the connection between these different stances toward the question of human will, it is quite clear that any detailed study of early Christian attitudes toward these topics should include systems that restrict human choice such as the one we find in *TriTrac*.

Another topic that would undoubtedly yield fruitful results in light of the above study is the monastic connection; the determinism of *TriTrac* could be compared with how the doctrine of free will was received in monastic writings. Shenoute, for example, believed that oaths and sincerity were not enough to make new recruits eligible for acceptance into the monastery; some were simply prone to sin because they possessed a will to do so. It did not mean anything if a person promised they would not sin; if their will was of a sinful disposition, not even the “thought of God” could prevent that person from wicked behavior, Shenoute writes.⁴ Here, it would seem, the strict interpretations of free will and determinism intersect. Shenoute’s response of rejecting new recruits’ oaths because they might not reflect their true will could be interpreted as strong support for the doctrine of free will (one can always change one’s mind), but seems to fit the opposite view even better: it is the ‘nature’ of one’s will that decides how one acts in the long run (why else would one not trust a person’s sincere oath?), and this will cannot be changed by any simple mind trick. An anthropology which did not entertain the possibility that people could change their nature would not necessarily have sounded strange in a monastic context, where people devoted their lives to sternly regulated practice. Some were just not made for such a life.

The pedagogical model presented in *TriTrac* is, indeed, reminiscent of early monasticism. Many recent studies of Egyptian monasticism have highlighted the connection to classical paideia and school culture and this perspective also fits *TriTrac*. Apart from the broad general similarities discussed above, there are striking similarities between *TriTrac* and monastic texts: for example, the emphasis on the therapy of emotions and

3 For more on Augustine’s view of free will, and his dependence on—like both *TriTrac* and Origen—Stoic cognitive theory, see Peter King, *Augustine: On the Free Choice of the Will, On Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), x–xvi. Also like *TriTrac*, Augustine was familiar with the Stoic distinction between proto-passions and full-blown emotions. See Sarah C. Byers, “Augustine and the Cognitive Cause of Stoic Preliminary Passions (Propatheiai)” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 41 (2003): 433–448.

4 See the quotes from Shenoute’s *On Monastic Vows* in Timbie, “The State of Research”, 264–265.

combatting of demons. In *TriTrac*, the distinction between pneumatics and psychics strikes a chord with the topic of spiritual warfare, one that is immensely popular in monastic literature. As we have seen, pneumatic people are described as coming to this world to “experience the evil things and might train themselves in them”.⁵ The operative word here is $\bar{\rho}\Gamma\Upsilon\text{M}\text{N}\Delta\text{Z}\text{E}$ ($\gamma\rho\mu\nu\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega$), which Clement and Origen also used for the exercise of higher spiritual and moral Christian life.⁶ However, in a monastic context $\bar{\rho}\Gamma\Upsilon\text{M}\text{N}\Delta\text{Z}\text{E}$ is also used for preparing to withstand attacks against evil demons, as in *Life of Antony*.⁷ In *TriTrac* 119:23–27 we read that even psychic people, those who are not made to learn about evil, will receive salvation, a concept that surely would have been a comfort for failed monks or lay Christians who did not have the stamina of a spiritual warrior like Antony. While some studies have been devoted to the connection between the Nag Hammadi texts and monasticism,⁸ much still remains to be done. I strongly believe that we would gain much by reading *TriTrac* not only from the perspective of third-century Alexandrian Christianity, but also next to later monastic literature and texts that derive from the same region as the Nag Hammadi texts, like the Bodmer papyri.⁹ Our understanding of both *TriTrac* as well as early monasticism would surely gain new and exciting nuances.

It has recently been argued fairly convincingly that the Nag Hammadi codices derived from a monastic context.¹⁰ Some attempts have been made to read the codices that can be attached to each other as collections.¹¹ As implied in Chapter 3, several of the texts copied by the scribes behind Codex I, VII, and XI could be viewed as proposing a deterministic worldview. This is another connection that should be investigated further, one which could yield interesting results with regard to the background of the collection and its place in Egyptian Christianity.

As we have seen, *TriTrac* also lends itself to studies of early Christian attempts to claim authority. Contrary to the bishop, presbyter, and deacon structure that would become fairly established by the end of the third century, *TriTrac* seems to support an alternative structure where the teacher and intellectual recluse makes up the core of “the church” and caters to the spiritual and educational needs of a laity. Comparing

5 126:32–34: $\epsilon\gamma\text{N}\Delta\text{X}\text{I}$ $\text{†}\text{P}\epsilon$ $\bar{\text{N}}\bar{\text{N}}\bar{\text{P}}\bar{\text{N}}\bar{\text{E}}\bar{\text{T}}\bar{\text{O}}\bar{\text{A}}\bar{\text{L}}\bar{\text{O}}\bar{\text{Y}}$ $\alpha\gamma\omega$ $\bar{\text{N}}\bar{\text{C}}\bar{\text{E}}\bar{\text{P}}$ $\Gamma\Upsilon\text{M}\text{N}\Delta\text{Z}\text{E}$: $\bar{\text{M}}\bar{\text{H}}\bar{\text{A}}\bar{\text{Y}}$ $\bar{\text{N}}\bar{\text{E}}\bar{\text{P}}\bar{\text{H}}\bar{\text{I}}$ $\bar{\text{N}}\bar{\text{E}}\bar{\text{H}}\bar{\text{T}}\bar{\text{O}}\bar{\text{Y}}$.

6 Clement, *Stromata* VI.10, VII.7; Origen, *Against Celsus* IV.50.

7 See the Coptic *Life of Antony* 88.

8 Most recently Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*; but see also Jenott and Pagels, “Antony’s Letters”; Williams, “The *Life of Antony*”.

9 For example, Bodmer XLI, the Lycopolitan *Acta Pauli*, is one of few texts that is close to *TriTrac* dialectically (Nagel, “Lycopolitan”). And it is obvious that Paul was a great source of inspiration for *TriTrac*. For more on the Bodmer papyri, see James M. Robinson, *Story of the Bodmer Papyri: From the First Monastery’s Library in Upper Egypt to Geneva and Dublin* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2011).

10 Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*.

11 For details, see the introductory chapter above.

this model to Manichean community structures would also yield interesting results, as they were communities that made similar anthropological distinctions to those we find in *TriTrac*. The way *TriTrac* relates to questions of authority was most likely a reflection of its early third-century context when church structures were still being negotiated. The structure promoted in *TriTrac* was a better fit with the monastic context than the ecclesiastical milieu of the established church of the fourth century.