One often reads, or hears, that the Ancients had no theory, or concept, or idea of the will in our sense of the word. Perhaps the best known recent promotor of this view is A. Dihle, who devoted an entire and very learned monograph to this issue.\(^1\)

I

I shall not, of course, address this huge subject as a whole, but only look at part of it. My not entirely original point of departure is a rather obvious question, namely: do we moderns, or post-moderns if you wish, really have a clear-cut concept of the

* Schopenhauer's philology is not good enough, but his point is worth taking. For the quotation, part of a note on Anaxagoras jotted down in 1825, see Frauenstädt 1864, p. 338, or Hübscher 1970, p. 213 f.

1. Dihle 1982. Trimmed-down German transl. by the author: Dihle 1985 (I shall refer to the English original). Cf. also Dirlmeier 1964, pp. 327 f. n. 3. who however is aware that “Vieles was wir als Wille (= Energie) bezeichnen, wäre griechisch θυμός.”
will which the ancients did not have? There is no separate article on Will in the Encyclopedia of Philosophy, although it has an article on Choosing, Deciding, and Acting, and others on Determinism, on General Will, The, and on Volition, and although its index sub voce “will” provides a list of names starting with the medieval Arab philosopher al-Farabi and going all the way down the alphabet to the nineteenth-century German psychologist Wilhelm Wundt. The indexes of a number of books concerned with ethics in the ancient world do not have an entry for “will” either, although some of them have one for Williams; but this is by the way.

Dihle, in the book I have just cited, does not begin by telling us what is his theory, or definition, of the will. He seems to suppose that we, having heard of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche and of course having been told as children by our parents that where there’s a will there’s a way, already know what we mean when using the word, and apparently wants us to find out what he has in mind by studying his book and discovering in the process what it is that according to him is lacking in the conceptual world of Greek and even Roman antiquity until Augustine and the full-blown Christian concept of the will made their appearance.

What I have noticed is that Dihle wants a will that is a separate faculty to be distinguished from reason on the one hand and from desire and the emotions, or passions, on the other. He finds such a will in the world of the Old Testament. In the first place, he argues, God’s often inscrutable and even whimsical will has as its counterpart a human will that is willing to accept whatever God ordains. You, a human being, do not want something to occur and try to make it happen, but conversely: what-

3. The helpful definition to be found s.v. “will” in Hornby, Gatenby and Wakefield 1972 runs: “mental power by which a person can direct his thoughts and actions, and influence those of others.”
4. Cf. the account and apposite criticism of Dihle’s approach by Kahn 1988. It does not seem that Dihle has seen Schopenhauer’s Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung. For Augustine’s doctrine of the will see esp. the De trinit. bks. IX-XI, on the 'trinities' memoria-intelligentia-voluntas and res-sensus-voluntas.