

Rejoinder to Evgenia Moiseeva's, December 2019 *RBL* review of
Kenneth M. Wilson's *Augustine's Conversion from Traditional
Free Choice to "Non-Free Free Will": A Comprehensive Methodology*

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As an appreciative and regular reader of the *Review of Biblical Literature*, I was surprised at the pervasive misrepresentations in Evgenia Moiseeva's review of December 2019. Her review concerned Kenneth M. Wilson's *Augustine's Conversion from Traditional Free Choice to "Non-Free Free Will": A Comprehensive Methodology*, my Oxford doctoral thesis published by Mohr Siebeck in 2018. Her misrepresentations are disappointing since Ms. Moiseeva wrote her Ph.D. (at École Pratique des Hautes Études) on Augustine's view of the will, and is a research librarian in the public library system in Boston, Massachusetts. If this were a political debate, I fear readers would dismiss my work due to the sheer number of pejorative accusations against it. However, I trust that scholars who read *RBL* are capable of discerning scholarly work from political propaganda. In what follows, I will assist *RBL* readers in identifying Moiseeva's misrepresentations.

"The error of the consensus view Wilson argues, is rooted in incorrect dating of *Lib.* 3.47–54 and *Simpl.* 1.2 which he moves by fifteen years to fit his theory." E.M. misrepresents the substantial evidence for re-dating parts of these works to after 411 CE. The reviewer writes, "The year 396/397 for *De libero arbitrio* and *Ad Simplicianum* is never questioned, as it is based on Augustine's own testimony in *Retractiones*. Against this consensus view,

Wilson puts forward a conjecture that both texts were revised by Augustine in 411-412, with Augustine failing to mention these in *Retractiones* or anywhere else." This misrepresents the fact that the book accepts the consensus dating of *De libero arbitrio* to 395 CE (p.300, not her erroneous "396/397") with Augustine's revision adding only 3.47–54 in 412 CE. The reviewer acknowledges this possible revision by Augustine: "Wilson gives nine arguments." But she does not discuss the merits of these nine arguments. Instead, she summarily dismisses them, writing, "Some of the [*sic*] Wilson's arguments simply do not hold water: for example, the assertion that Lib. 3.4–11 and 3.47 treat divine foreknowledge in a similar way is inexplicably given by Wilson as a proof that Lib. 3.47 was changed around 411." She "inexplicably" misrepresents my numerous evidences (not a solitary "proof") and arguments on pages 135–138. As is typical of her misrepresentations, she never refutes my points with evidence—she resorts to deriding them.

Concerning re-dating *Ad Simplicianum* 1.2 to 411 CE (pp.144–147), she never mentions any of the twelve arguments listed in the book. Somehow, she thinks by claiming Augustine did not admit he revised it and that the original letter had already been "in circulation," she has rendered these twelve arguments superfluous. She has not read or understood my explanation about circulation (pp.139–155, 274–276, esp. 152), and either ignores or is unaware of Augustine's numerous unannounced revisions of his works already accepted by scholars.

Her misrepresentations of the book's positions may be an unconscious reaction to defend Augustine against what she perceives as the charge of Manichaeism: "Wilson argues that after 411 Augustine parted ways with Christianity and essentially reverted to the

Manichaeism." However, the book never suggests Augustine parted ways with Christianity. Augustine remained a devout Christian from 386 until his death in 430 CE, and was an excellent bishop. The book demonstrates that Augustine's later view of divine grace and unilateral determinism were Manichaeism. That does not make the Bishop of Hippo a Manichaean. The reviewer should be aware of this distinction since her visiting scholar project at the Center for the Study of World Religions was on Manichaeism.

Regarding views of determinism, E.M. erroneously claims the book lumps all authors who are not Jewish or Christian into the category of "'non-free free will' determinism." She does not understand this Stoic concept, evidenced by her claim that I place "Platonists and everybody else outside Judaism and 'traditional' Christianity" into this category. Teaching a generalized deterministic viewpoint does not equate to teaching Stoic "non-free free will" (e.g., pp.11–12 versus 16–19). This is a sophomoric error.

E.M. misrepresents the book's argument on Augustine's later use of *reatus* versus *culpa*. The book argues *reatus* was critical for his novel view that original sin causes newborns to be eternally damned (mildly) until baptized. She mistakenly hyper-focuses on a bilingual dictionary as the alleged *tour de force*: "a theological thesis is proved with the help of a bilingual dictionary. No attempt is made to use Augustine's texts to demonstrate that Augustine actually meant a different thing when he used *reatus* rather than *culpa*. The weakness of such argumentation speaks for itself." Perhaps pages 146–147 (see also pp.159, 178, 268) were missing from her copy of the book, wherein the analysis of Augustine's dramatic change in usage in his specific works are cited for the reader.

"His work is filled with mistakes and oddities of all kinds." Contrary to E.M.'s assumptive claim that "Wilson lists Mani as the author of Cologne Mani Codex," the association of Mani with the *Cologne-Mani Codex* on page 311 does not indicate I thought Mani was the author (see p.328). Regarding my categorization of ancient authors, she considers Bar Daisan to be "no closer to [her] 'traditional' Christianity than Mani," but many scholars view his works against Marcion and Valentinus (Gnostics), as well as his defense of free will, as evidence that he was more of a Christian than a 'traditional' Gnostic or Manichaean.

Similarly, whether or not Alexander of Lycopolis was a Christian philosopher remains debated. The reviewer criticizes my summaries using secondary sources (alongside primary ones) and fails to notice Manichaean 'grace' is set off in quotation marks while triumphantly stating Stroumsa's "article never mentions the concept of grace" (I was privileged to study under Guy Stroumsa). She criticizes the book's failure to cite four specific works she feels to be essential to my thesis on re-dating Augustine's transition—without explaining what crucial information they would add—not otherwise found in my five-hundred eighty-two works cited.

Finally, Moiseeva concludes: "The book lacks every characteristic of a good work: a well formulated thesis and clearly exposed arguments, [etc.]." Is her "every" a deliberate misrepresentation? She herself identified the book's thesis: "Wilson argues that the fundamental change in Augustine's theology did not occur until 412." This thesis is stated on page 1: "Four commonplace assertions within Augustinian studies are questioned in this treatise: 1. Augustine changed his theology in 396 CE" Likewise, one suspects her

other claims that the book lacks "clearly exposed arguments, [etc.]" mean merely that the reviewer chooses not to agree with those arguments, yet cannot disprove them.

I must partly agree with her closing sentence: my work cannot challenge established views if readers are unwilling to wrestle with the evidence, but prefer to dismiss it disparagingly. Neither can my work challenge established views if readers are dissuaded from reading it by repeated misrepresentations written to discredit my work. Moiseeva flatters me that I wrote an Oxford doctoral thesis published by Mohr Siebeck that "lacks every characteristic of a good work"—quite an accomplishment!

My book's preface "prophetically" warned: "In an age where some persons have rejected the very concept of truth while others cling to the comfort of tradition, it seems all the more essential for scholars to examine facts openly and critically" (p.VIII). I welcome and look forward to engaging with critical scholarly responses to my book on Augustine. However, this unprofessional review by Moiseeva does not belong in the scholarly *RBL*, but in a tabloid full of misrepresentations.