



Free Will in Elly Ebenspanger (1904–1942?)

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In her only published book, *Problem slobode volje (The Free Will Problem)*, Elly Ebenspanger opens with the statement that the free will problem goes beyond mere ethical issues: it intrudes into other disciplines, like psychology, metaphysics, law and epistemology (Ebenspanger 1939: “Introduction”). Of these, Ebenspanger focuses on ethics and psychology. By this self-restriction she can more easily approach her central problem: is there a way to understand will as free beyond predominant “scientific” (i.e. psychological) proofs of its being determined? The crux of the problem includes the following distinct approaches: 1. the primary sphere of experience in which freedom of will is given as a fact of life, not subjected to reflection, 2. the sphere of reflection in which scientific psychology proves the principle of causality as a general deterministic principle, and 3. evaluation as a sphere in which the psychological concept of will differs from the ethical concept of will. It is through this latter approach that Ebenspanger transcends the contradiction between the science-based determinism of the first approach to the problem, and the ethical assumption of an indeterministic free will that is inherent in the second approach to the problem (Ebenspanger 1939: 57–60).

Rather than treating the concept of will substantively (as the capacity of the *voluntas*) Ebenspanger treats will in terms of actualization (as *volitiones*, separate volitional acts, Ebenspanger 1939: 35–37), and distinguishes it from the psychological concept of will as a psychic process. Ethics is concerned with *how* a volitional act *ought* to be in respect to values – and this *ought* presupposes freedom on behalf of the agent. Freedom is understood as the absence of coercion with regards to an activity that is directed towards a value. The immediate consciousness of freedom of will eludes any sort of scientific explanation (Ebenspanger 1939: 4). Ethically speaking, freedom signifies human capacity to take a stand towards instantiating or acting according to particular values, it denotes an agent’s responsibility for her volitional acts (Ebenspanger 1939: 40–42).

Primary Sources:

Ebenspanger, Elly 1939. *Problem slobode volje*. Zagreb: Zaklada tiskare Narodnih novina.

Secondary Sources:

Girardi-Karšulin, Mihaela 2017. Elly Ebenspanger, in Boršić, Luka & Karasman, Ivana Skuhala (eds.), *Filozofkinje u Hrvatskoj*. Zagreb: Institut za filozofiju, 163–176.

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