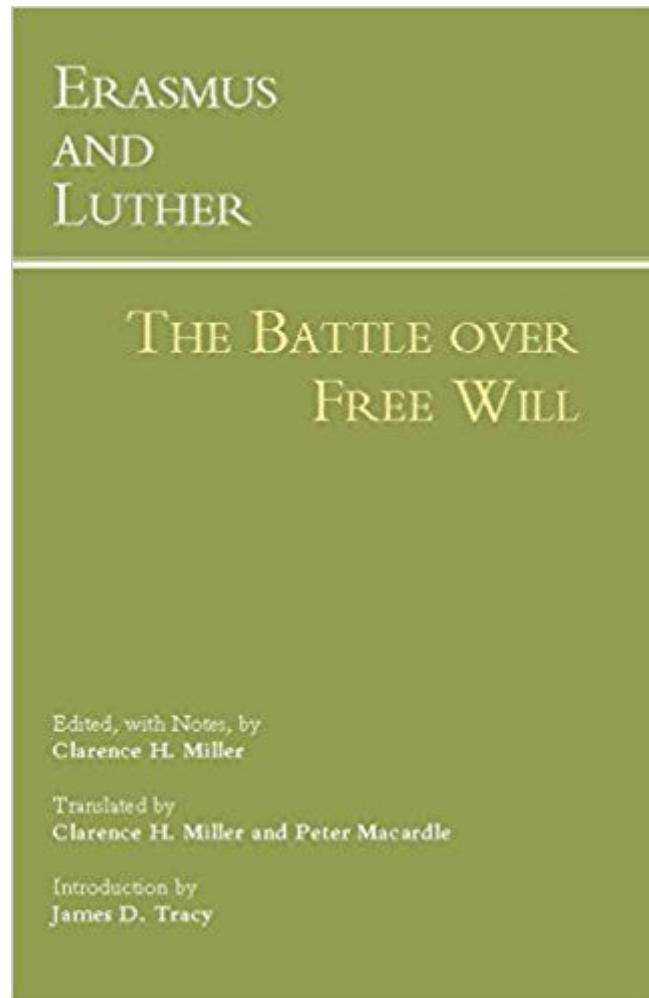




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# Erasmus And Luther: The Battle Over Free Will (Hackett Classics)



## Synopsis

This compilation of writings from Erasmus and Luther's great debate--over free will and grace, and their respective efficacy for salvation--offers a fuller representation of the disputants' main arguments than has ever been available in a single volume in English. Included are key, corresponding selections from not only Erasmus' conciliatory *A Discussion or Discourse concerning Free Will* and Luther's forceful and fully argued rebuttal, but--with the battle now joined--from Erasmus' own forceful and fully argued rebuttal of Luther. Students of Reformation theology, Christian humanism, and sixteenth-century rhetoric will find here the key to a wider appreciation of one of early modern Christianity's most illuminating and disputed controversies.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Among the most dramatic exchanges in Western intellectual history was the confrontation between Erasmus and Luther over freedom of the will--or, as Luther conceived of it, bound choice. Clarence H. Miller provides extensive selections from both sides of this vital debate--from Erasmus' *A Discussion or Discourse concerning Free Will*; from Luther's reply, *The Enslaved Will*; and from Erasmus' extensive rebuttal, *The Shield-Bearer Defending* *A Discussion*--outfitting them with helpful notes that bring readers into the world of the texts. James D. Tracy's Introduction masterfully and concisely depicts the two participants in this literary disputation, the concerns that governed their thinking, and the intellectual context of their

debate— one that still offers much to readers reflecting on what it means to be human in our own age. --Robert A. Kolb, Missions Professor of Systematic Theology Emeritus, Concordia Seminary

Erasmus has the first and last word in this version of the famous debate on free will. He needs all the help he can get, given that Luther captivates the readers with his scathing wit, pristine deductive logic, and pithy if dismissive rejoinders. . . . This volume of substantial excerpts translated by Clarence H. Miller and Peter Macardle . . . provides Reformation scholars with the most comprehensive existing treatment of the exchange between Erasmus and Luther on the Reformation exegesis, philosophy, and politics of free will, grace, and Law. The comprehensive and detailed biographical and theological introduction concisely covers the cultural history and the central doctrinal issues informing the debate, most notably the Pauline influences." --Alice Crawford Berghof, English, UC Irvine (adapted from Comitatus)

As James D. Tracy notes in the excellent introduction to Clarence H. Miller's Erasmus and Luther: The Battle over Free Will, "In the history of the European Reformation, few issues were as important as the one debated by Erasmus and Luther: Are human beings capable of contributing to their own salvation by what they choose to do or not to do?" Miller's edition provides a more comprehensive view of the debate than the usual English texts used in classrooms and accurately reflects the history of the debate. Miller and Macardle's translation is clear and flows well. Compared to Winter's text, this edition offers a stronger supportive apparatus, including helpful notes and an updated bibliography. Erasmus' and Luther's debate over the freedom of the will remains a central point of access to the study of the Reformation. It highlights the fundamental issues of the Reformation as well as the differences between those eager for reform within the Church and those who believed that the Church was so fundamentally off track that no reform could sufficiently set it right. Luther's vehemence and self-assurance in The Enslaved Will say almost as much about his reform movement as his arguments do. Erasmus' three efforts to defend the freedom of the will demonstrate not only his nuanced approach to theology, Scripture, and Church tradition, but also his concern for the consequences of Church schism." --Greta Grace Kroeker, History, University of Waterloo (condensed from Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook)

Clarence H. Miller is Professor Emeritus of English, St. Louis University. Peter Macardle is Lecturer in German in the School of Modern Languages and Cultures, Durham University. James D. Tracy is Professor Emeritus of History, University of Minnesota.

I enjoyed reading this. The kindle rendition is fine with no discrepancies that I could find. I now

believe that all publications that combine Erasmus's Discussion with Luther's Bondage of the Will but leave off Erasmus's rebuttal should be banned or burned. Without the rebuttal you don't all get a sense of what Erasmus believes and you will tend to think Luther has conquered. The rebuttal is the longest section of the book but also the best. I would encourage anyone who likes Bondage of the Will BUT ALSO likes to weigh opinions and interpretations and attempt to understand ancient church opinions (without canonizing them) to read this book. I believe Erasmus does a good job of taking Luther down off his pedestal a bit. (Note I am not a Catholic nor a Lutheran ... nor a Calvinist as far as that goes) Though I was raised to believe Luther was a great man; the more I read his actual works - like his commentary on Galatians - the more I wonder if he wasn't a little mentally imbalanced. No offense meant to my Lutheran friends. :)

Although this book is far longer than it needs to be, it gives great insight into the thinking of these great minds at the forefront of the Reformation. I was shocked when exposed to the shallow, easily refuted nature of Luther's arguments against free will. I love the spirit of Erasmus and his impartial search for truth, fearing not which side of a question he lands on. Erasmus seems much more in line with the spirit of Christ, love, and the Holy Ghost.

The editors have done a fantastic job with Erasmus' and Luther's debates. The footnotes they supply are very helpful. I highly suggest to anyone who is wrestling with Calvinism to buy and read this book. For me, Erasmus came out the victor. I particularly enjoyed how he convincingly demonstrated that "free will" was part of the consensual view of the Church (from the first century up to the fifteenth century); and that consensus would include Augustine!

Most insightful.

Brilliant, concise, relevant. If you are studying the reformation this book will get you into the middle of the history.

Most publications of the correspondence of Erasmus and Luther over the question of Free Will only include Erasmus' first letter and Luther's reply. The fact that Erasmus made a defense of his first letter often goes unnoticed. This book rectifies the problem. Erasmus explains why, though he does have an opinion on the issue, he does not speak forcefully in his first letter, but rather tries to be conciliatory. He then takes time to respond to each of Luther's criticisms. It is unfortunate that Luther

was so vitriolic and insulting in his tone. Later he tried to regain Erasmus' friendship, but to no avail. The book received five stars despite the fact that it still does not have the full correspondence between Erasmus and Luther, rather, selections of each of their letters (along with an outline of the entire work). This is because, for the price, you cannot get a fuller English text of the conversation and the book would have had to have been probably twice as long as its already almost 400 pages. Nonetheless, for those who want the entire conversation, they will have to look at the complete works of Luther and Erasmus. The book was definitely worth the money and the time I put into it.

I'm very pleased to have come across this collection of treatises back and forth between Desiderius Erasmus and Martin Luther. Erasmus is a Catholic and one of the most influential humanists of his day. Luther is, of course, the "father" of the Reformation. Included in this book are substantial excerpts from Erasmus's "A Discussion or Discourse concerning Free Will" (1524), Luther's reply in "The Enslaved Will" (1525), and Erasmus's counter-replies in "The Shield-Bearer Defending A Discussion" Parts 1 (1526) and 2 (1527). Although these texts do not appear in their entirety, there is more than enough to give you a very thorough sampling of the respective parties' viewpoints on free will and grace. The excerpts fill 346 pages, 95 of which are devoted to Luther and the rest to Erasmus. Essentially, Erasmus lays out the case for free will, noting its long tradition of acceptance among learned commentators of the Catholic Church, but devoting most of his attention to the Scriptural evidence and logical reasons for believing in free will, and to (valid) questions concerning how Luther acquired the confidence to oppose such a long tradition of respected commentators by rejecting free will. Luther's rebuttal in "The Enslaved Will" tries to make a case for "absolute necessity" (that everything man does, good or evil, is wholly determined by God--and that free will is a fiction that has no basis in Scripture); however, this is certainly not Luther at his finest. With no disrespect to Luther's intentions, he is clearly outmatched by Erasmus as a writer. Erasmus brilliantly maintains a tone of humble supplication, as one who is asking Luther to teach him and help him resolve his doubts about whether free will or absolute necessity is correct. But Luther frequently loses his cool and stoops to insults and seemingly hurried rebuttals that often contain fallacies or sloppy reasoning. This is not to say that Luther's beliefs are wrong, per se--only that his case feels very weak against the onslaught of Erasmus's superior writing style and his numerous, valid doubts. This collection is worth reading for several reasons. One, it will get you up to speed on a major debate of the Reformation which shaped the theology and terminology of Protestants for a long time after. Two, it will show you an expert writer (Erasmus) at work, and attentive readers will surely be impressed by, for example, Erasmus's ability to use a simple metaphor to clarify

beautifully some difficult concepts that would otherwise feel abstract and dense. Three, it will key you in to some of the significant concerns and vocabulary that permeate early modern English literature. Authors like Spenser, Marlowe, Webster, and Milton work closely with the concepts of free will and grace that are being invoked here. Though those writers are all Protestant, they mostly end up agreeing with Erasmus that man must have at least some sliver of free will in order for his actions to be meaningful and for God to be truly just. Luther's notion of absolute necessity is just too strict to be embraced fully; however, they nonetheless share and echo Luther's broader concern to downplay the efficacy of man's will in order to discourage egotism and to place much greater emphasis on man's almost absolute need for God's helping grace. Well worth a read, though this level of theology is admittedly drier and more intellectually taxing than casual reading. If you're a high level reader and familiar with the style of academic articles or books, you won't be too far outside your comfort zone here. Erasmus is much easier to follow because he assumes a non-expert audience, but Luther is a bit harder because he often employs a more formal, scholastic mode of argumentation.

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