

Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility in the Fourth Gospel¹

Harold W. Attridge

One of the perennial issues in assessing the theology of the Fourth Gospel is its understanding of the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Some readers find that the gospel displays a rigidly determinist scheme; others find that it creates a space for human responsibility. Others are content to affirm that the gospel, perhaps like other Jewish sources, holds that the two principles are compatible, although it is unclear how that compatibility works.² Yet others relate the tensive principles to the gospel's social circumstances. This paper argues that the evangelist affirms both principles, but not in a haphazard or incoherent way. The Gospel leads the attentive reader through a meditation on a framework within which the two principles can be maintained. Comparison with roughly contemporary treatments of the issue will clarify the Johannine position.

Basic Data

Some passages in the Gospel suggest that a divine plan governs the activity of Jesus. The notion is most clearly expressed in passages referring to Jesus' "hour," which is still in the future in the first half of the gospel (John 2:4; 7:30; 8:20). The hour has come when Jesus arrives for the last time in Jerusalem (John 12:23, 27), but it lasts through the Passion (13:1; 17:1). Expectation of an ordained sequence of events also appears in the reference to the anticipated outpouring of the Spirit (7:37–38), which was not available until after Jesus' glorification (7:39), in the condition of the man born blind (9:3), the death of Lazarus, (11:4) or the betrayal of Judas (17:12), all of which serve a divine purpose.

The appointed schedule, especially the time designated for Jesus to confront the forces of darkness (dramatically identified in 12:30), evokes apocalyptic scenarios and sapiential affirmations that God controls times and seasons.

1 It is a pleasure to contribute this essay to honour Christopher Rowland, whose insights have made such significant contributions to New Testament scholarship.

2 So C. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (2 vols.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2003) 1:571–74, discussing 12:37–45.

Yet the belief that God *determines* a plan does not entail that God *predestines* the fate of individuals within that plan.³

There is more in John than the gesture toward an overall divine plan. A thematic thread runs through the first half of the gospel that involves issues of divine sovereignty and human responsibility.⁴ This kind of sequencing is a familiar element of the Gospel, which is laced with interwoven thematic strands, a subject of recent scholarly attention.⁵ Such thematic strands might be thought of as parts of an intricately interwoven arabesque, where the interconnections are significant.

Key points in the development of the theme are:

- (1) The dialogue with Nicodemus, John 3:3–5;
- (1b) The later comment by the narrator, John 3:19–21.
- (2) The Bread of Life Discourse, John 6:29; 37–39, 44–45;
- (3) The pointed polemics of chapter 8, John 8:43–47;
- (4) The final part of the Good Shepherd discourse, John 10:25–29;
- (5) The citation of prophetic texts, John 12:37–43.

The sequence has convinced many commentators of the Johannine commitment to a predestinarian scheme.⁶ The resistance of others is driven largely by the Gospel's general narrative, which portrays Jesus inviting and trying to

3 On the distinction in connection with Qumran, see H. Burgmann, "Theorie und Wirklichkeit in der Qumrangemeinde: Determinismus—Monismus—Dualismus—Prädestination," in idem, *Die essenischen Gemeinden von Qumran und Damaskus in der Zeit der Hasmonäer und Herodier* (130 ante–68 post) (ANTJ 8; Frankfurt: Lang, 1988) 13–37.

4 See e.g., E. Popkes, "Exkurs: Die sukzessive Entfaltung des Prädestinationsgedankens im Erzählverlauf des Johannesevangeliums," *Die Theologie der Liebe Gottes in den johanneischen Schriften: Zur Semantik der Liebe und zum Motivkreis des Dualismus* (WUNT 2.197; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005) 204–211.

5 See, e.g., W. Meeks, "The Man From Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," *JBL* 91 (1972) 44–72, repr. in J. Ashton, ed., *Interpretations of the Fourth Gospel* (London/Philadelphia: SPCK/ Fortress, 1986) 141–173, and in idem, *In Search of the Early Christians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002) 64, commenting on the evangelist's "the elucidation of themes by progressive repetition"; J. Frey, "Love-Relations in the Fourth Gospel: Establishing a Semantic Network," in G. Van Belle, M. Labahn & P. Maritz, *Repetitions and Variations in the Fourth Gospel. Style, Text, Interpretation* (BETHL 223; Leuven: Peeters, 2009) 171–198; R. Zimmermann, "Metaphoric Networks as Hermeneutic Keys in the Gospel of John: Using the Example of the Mission Imagery," in van Belle, *Repetitions*, 381–402; and on "glory," N. Chibici-Revneanu, *Die Herrlichkeit des Verherrlichten* (WUNT 2.231; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), esp. 325–330.

6 For a roster of different interpretations, see Popkes, *Liebe Gottes*, 205 n. 59. See, e.g., U. Wilckens, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (NTD 4; Göttingen: Vanenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998) 67.

persuade people to accept him. Persuasion and predestination seem unlikely bedfellows.

Perhaps the most famous effort to read these passages differently is that of Rudolf Bultmann, who finds in the Gospel a dualism of decision focusing on the reaction to Jesus' challenge to accept or reject "authentic existence." He finds in particular that "origins" are defined in the moment of decision for or against the revealer.

what is meant is that in the decision of faith or unbelief it becomes apparent what man really is and what he always was. But it is revealed in such a way that the decision is made only now.⁷

Bultmann is not alone in resisting the impulse to find predestination in the gospel. Francis Moloney, commenting on John 3:19–21, writes:

The doing of evil results from *loving* the darkness and *choosing* it, hiding one's ambiguity in the darkness (v 20), just as a life of good deeds leads to one's coming into the light.⁸

Bultmann and Moloney read the gospel sensitively, but it is not at all clear from the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus and the reflections of the narrator John 3 why something like their readings of John are compelling.

In order to test these readings, it is useful to define more precisely the Gospel's apparent determinism. A way of framing the principle is that origins determine outcomes, clearly articulated in 3:6: "What is born of flesh is flesh and what is born of spirit is spirit."⁹ Who and what one *is* is a simple function of where one is *from*.¹⁰ What is striking about the Gospel, which supports the alternative understanding of its anthropology, is a second principle articulated in the same context. There is the possibility of what my grandchildren would

⁷ R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* (Philadelphia: Westminster; Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), 159.

⁸ *John* (Sacra Pagina 4; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1998) 96; later, on p. 120, he notes that the passage contains a "suggestion of predestination," countered by his own reading.

⁹ Cf. also 8:47 and 10:26.

¹⁰ So R. Schnackenberg, *The Gospel according to St. John* (3 vols.; London: Burns & Oates; New York: Crossroad, 1968–82) 1:371, "In Johannine thinking, the nature is determined by its origin, as appears from the frequent εἶναί ἐκ, which affirms both origin and type of being." He notes 3:31; 8:23, 44, 47; 15:19; 17:14, 16; 18:36–37; 1 John 2:16, 21; 3:8, 10, 12, 19; 4:1–3. See L.E. Keck, "Derivation as Destiny: 'Of-ness' in Johannine Christology, Anthropology, and Soteriology," in R.A. Culpepper and C.C. Black, eds., *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1996), 274–88.

say is a “do over.” This is principle 2: A false start can be erased and one can start again; one can be born “ἀνωθεν,” but only when the Spirit does its work. That work is as mysterious as is the coming and going of the wind.

The dialogue of chapter 3 equally affirms the two principles, “P¹: Origins are Determinative” and “P²: The Spirit’s Work can Create a New Origin.” The note that there is something mysterious about how P² works might merit the title of a “riddle.”¹¹ There has been recent attention to “riddles” in the Gospel.¹² Whatever their relationship with folklore,¹³ the Gospel contains some very puzzling texts, which often contribute to the schemes of progressive repetition.¹⁴ In the case of the “born ἀνωθεν” principle, the “implied” reader, and even a real reader, is left scratching her head, like Nicodemus before departing from chapter 3. “So,” the reader might ask, “is there any way of knowing how the πνεῦμα works to reset the point of origin?”

The Gospel does not answer immediately; delayed development of a theme is part of the Johannine technique. Before the chapter ends, the gospel makes one comment that advances the process, in the Baptist’s testimony at 3:27: “John answered and said, ‘A person is not able to receive a single thing if it is not given from heaven.’” Alas, that information does not explain how πνεῦμα effects rebirth. Does it present a gift that may be refused, or does it coerce acceptance? Is the Spirit’s mysterious gift merely a necessary condition for belief, or a necessary and sufficient condition? To decide, it is necessary to trace the further development of the two basic principles.

That Origins are Determinative, P¹, seems to dominate, particularly in chapters 8 and 10, where P² is nowhere in sight. P¹ is also missing, at least on the surface, in the final passage on our roster, 12:38–40, the explanation, using Isaiah 53:1 and 6:10, of why it is that some people fail to comprehend what Jesus has taught:

¹¹ The famous saying in *m. Abot* 3:15/16 may work in much the same way.

¹² See H. Leroy, *Rätsel und Missverständnis: Ein Beitrag zur Formgeschichte des Johannesevangeliums* (BBB 30; Bonn: Hanstein, 1968); P. Anderson, *The Riddles of the Fourth Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), esp. 35–36 on predestination, in 2:24–25; 5:42; 6:64, 71; 10:27; 13:11; 16:19, and free will, in 1:12; 3:14–17; 20:31.

¹³ See T. Thatcher, *The Riddles of Jesus in John: A Study in Tradition and Folklore* (SBLMS 53; Atlanta, Ga.: SBL, 2000); idem, “Riddles, Repetitions, and the Literary Unity of the Johannine Discourses,” in Van Belle, Labahn & Maritz, *Repetitions and Variations in the Fourth Gospel*, 357–377.

¹⁴ Thatcher’s analysis (*Riddles*, 264–271) of John 3:3, 5 as a “birth/life” riddle, which works by using two levels of discourse, does not quite capture the dynamics of John’s exploration of divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

He has blinded their eyes
and hardened their heart,
so that they might not see with their eyes
and understand with their heart.

Someone, “He,” is responsible for the hardening of hearts, not simply, as in other citations of Isa 6:10 (Mark 4:12; Matt 13:14–15; Acts 28:26–27) to prevent them from understanding parables, but more radically, to prevent them from seeing or hearing *anything*.¹⁵ This would appear to be decisively predestinarian.¹⁶

It is interesting to note Bultmann’s strained comment:

The thought that one’s actual behaviour in an individual instance is determined by the deepest ground of being does not destroy responsibility, but for the first time really awakens it; it brings to consciousness the importance of the concrete action. Man cannot look on his authentic being as something given in nature, rather he discovers it in his decisions. In the thought of the Evangelist the recollection of the prophecy has the sharpest appeal.¹⁷

15 R. Kühschelm, *Verstockung, Gericht und Heil: Exegetische und bibeltheologische Untersuchungen zum sogenannten “Dualismus” und “Determinismus” in Joh 12,35–50* (BBB 76; Frankfurt am M.: Hain, 1990).

16 See, e.g., Wilckens, *Evangelium*, 199; Other commentators on chapter 12 resist the notion that the text is predestinarian, arguing for some sort of “compatibilism.” See, e.g., A.J. Köstenberger, *John* (ECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004) 391: “The present statement is unambiguously predestinarian yet compatibilist, including elements of human responsibility as well.” He cites D.A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981) 448–49: “God’s judicial hardening is not presented as the capricious manipulation of an arbitrary potentate . . . but as a holy condemnation of a guilty people who are condemned to do and be what they themselves have chosen,” and H.N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1997) 444–45: “Unbelief is not thereby blamed on God in a predestinarian sense, but is rather described as punishment from God.”

17 Bultmann, *Gospel*, 452–54. Another way of resolving the tension is to invoke redaction and Bultmann suggests that this passage is part of his Signs Source. R. Fortna, *The Gospel of Signs: A Reconstruction of the Narrative Source Underlying the Fourth Gospel* (SNTSMS 11; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) 199, disagrees. The most recent source critic, U.C. von Wahlde, *The Gospel and Letters of John* (Eerdmans Critical Commentary, 3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010) 2:559–574, assigns the passage to the Gospel’s *final* stage. For a critique of redactional solutions to the tensions in the passage, see M. Theobald, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes, Kapitel 1–12* (Regensburger Neues Testament; Regensburg: Pustet, 2009), 276–277.

Bultmann may be right, but his position needs more explication.

So far this paper has explored what was labeled P¹ in the dialogue with Nicodemus, the principle that Origins Determine Outcomes. It is clearly expressed in chap. 8 and hinted at in the climactic denunciation of unbelievers in chap. 12. But chap. 12 does not, in fact, quite contain P¹. *God*, not the Devil or some other principle of deceit, initially *seems* to be motive force behind unbelief here. Something has happened to P¹ since chapter 3. The point requires further exploration.

But what about P², “Origins can be reset by the Spirit’s work”? Is the mystery at all resolved as the chain of passages evolves? Tantalizing ambiguity initially prevails. The theme next appears at 6:29: “Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in the one whom he has sent.’” The saying is ambiguous. Is the faith of the believer the work that God causes, or is faith simply a “Godly work.” The ambiguity could be framed in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. A rigorous predestinarian reading would make God both the necessary and sufficient condition of believing. An alternative, compatible with some kind of human freedom, would understand God to be the necessary, but not sufficient condition of believing, which would remain the believer’s decision. This ambiguous verse does not solve the riddle; it restates the problem.

The next hint comes at 6:37: “Whatever the Father gives me will come to me and the one who comes to me I shall not cast out.” This reassurance, echoed in 10:25–29, at least supports the notion that the Father’s attraction of the believer to Jesus is a necessary condition of relationship to him. Or one might construe 6:37 to say that the Father delivers the believer; end of story. But the text does not quite say that. Christ promises not to expel the believer, but can he or she decide not to stay? Can he, like Judas, dip the morsel and then go out into the night? Neither, by the way, does the equally reassuring passage in 10:25–29 promise indefectibility. It says that no one can snatch away (ἀρπάξειν) any sheep that the Father has given Jesus, but it does not say that they cannot go astray on their own.

The theme continues in 6:44–45: These verses stand in continuity with earlier allusions to the theme in the Bread of Life Discourse, which had in turn continued the theme from chapter 3. Here the language of necessary and sufficient conditions becomes more than an analytical artifice; it is built into the wording of the first verse. In order for one to believe one must be drawn by the Father. But what is it to “come to Christ, drawn by the Father”? This question remained open after v. 37. This verse provides an answer, using the language of instruction. The one who “comes to Christ” is the one who “hears and learns” from the Father.

As often, an answer raises further questions. How, for instance, does one “hear the Father”? A dialogue from the previous chapter provided some resources for an answer. In responding to the charge that he had “made himself equal to God” (5:18), Jesus noted that expert witnesses supported his claims: the Baptist’s testimony, the scriptures, the Father, and implicitly, his own word (5:31–40). The paradoxical intricacies of that argument cannot be pursued here.¹⁸ Suffice it to say that the Gospel has affirmed that the Father’s voice can be heard. This is a good example of the Johannine arabesque at work. Our theme can only develop because it rests on the progression of another thematic strand, that dealing with “testimony.”

To return to 6:45: It would also be appropriate to consider whether hearing and learning are simple synonyms or whether the second verb introduces something new. Again, the previous chapter—and much of the Gospel’s first half—suggests that the two are not synonyms. One can be brought or drawn to the place of testimony, one can hear the testimony, but *one can refuse to listen; one can hear but learn nothing.*

Thus far the repetitive chain has established that becoming a disciple requires a divine gift, the opportunity to hear the instruction of the Father. It interpreted the work of the Spirit that resets origins in cognitive terms that may be construed apocalyptically as “revelation” or sapientially as “instruction.” In either case, the divine gift provides testimony to truth, which, as 8:32 indicates, will liberate. But does this unpacking of the mystery of P² determine whether John is predestinarian? In other words, will the instruction automatically illuminate? Will it convince all hearers? No, and why not? Does the teacher block the hearing of the pupils or do they just refuse to learn?

The climax of this complex theme, the quotation from Isaiah 6 in John 12:40, seems to offer a definitive answer. It appears that it is indeed the teacher who is responsible for the failure of the students, for the blinding of their eyes lest they see! In response to that paradoxical claim, “Wait!” the attentive reader might say, perhaps reminded by the unusual opening verse of the quotation,¹⁹ “We have already heard something about blindness. Is that relevant?”

18 See H.W. Attridge, “Argumentation in John 5,” in A. Eriksson, T.H. Olbricht, W. Übelacker, eds., *Rhetorical Argumentation in Biblical Texts* (Emory Studies in Early Christianity 8; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2002), 188–199, reprinted in *Essays on John and Hebrews* (WUNT 264; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 93–104.

19 On the text’s numerous difficulties, see especially C.A. Evans, “The Function of Isaiah 6:9–10 in Mark and John,” *NovT* 24 (1982) 124–38; and M.J.J. Menken, “He Has Blinded their Eyes . . .’ (John 12:40),” in idem, *Old Testament Quotations in the Fourth Gospel:*

Indeed, the carefully crafted story of chapter 9 told of a physically blind man given physical sight and then the spiritual “sight” of belief (9:38), while physically sighted Pharisees were blinded (9:39). Jesus’ conclusion anticipates chapter 12:

39 And Jesus said, “I have come into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see might have sight and those who see might become blind.”
 40 Those of the Pharisees who were with him heard these things and said to him, “Are we then blind?”
 41 Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin. But now you say, ‘We see.’ Your sin remains.”

The arabesque continues. This passage significantly advances the theme of “judgment,” but it also contributes to understanding the relationship between sovereignty and responsibility, on two critical points: (1) The presence of Jesus is the necessary condition of the judgment dividing people into two categories, but he is clearly not the sufficient condition of that separation. And (2) the Pharisees are responsible for their disbelief. As he declares to them, their “blindness” in not recognizing him is not his doing, neither—and this is most important—is it due to some prior condition. It is their responsibility; it is a “sin.”²⁰

It is possible to frame chapter 9 with the imagery of chapter 3. The encounter with the man born blind is a case of the Spirit blowing where it will, of resetting the point of origin from which all else that the man will be or do will derive. That reset occurs when, responding to Jesus’ self-revelation (9:37), the man says (9:38), “I believe.” The fact that others do not take that step is due not to a prior condition or external force; it is their responsibility.²¹

If one reads the prophetic pronouncements at the climax of the “predestination” motif in chapter 12 in light of chapter 9, one gets a different perspective from the initial impression from reading them in isolation. Two things are worth noting. First, the scriptural texts are clearly to be understood Christologically, relating to the one whose “glory” Isaiah saw (41). The connection with Christ is best understood when the quotations are seen to be in effect giving voice to Christ’s situation, lamenting that no one believes “our report (τῆ ἀκοῆ ἡμῶν).” That “report,” from the first quotation, in synonymous

Studies in Textual Form (CBET 15; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996), 99–122; and Theobald, *Das Evangelium* (see n. 17 above), 826–830.

20 Cf. also 15:22–24.

21 Moloney, *John*, 217–218, though treating the Bread of Life discourse.

parallelism with the “Lord’s right hand,” is the subject of the second.²² The strong light of its message “causes” the blindness and hardening, in the same way that it did in chapter 9. Blinding eyes, hardening hearts, and clouding minds, which prevent Jesus from “healing,” are not the work of a cruel God predestining sinners to damnation, but the result of the refusal of people to see and to understand the powerful divine voice that invites their belief.

The second point made by chapter 9 lurks at the end of the passage about those who do not openly confess their belief because of their “love” for the “opinion of men” (12:43). The comment reveals the root of the problem. They *loved* something more than the glory of God revealed to them; their love dictated their choice. In exposing that reality the Gospel resolves the riddle of how mysterious rebirth *ἀνωθεν* works. It is within the realm of human responsibility, to *learn* (chap. 6) to *love* (chap. 12) the love that has been manifested to all. When one accepts the lesson, one is born *ἀνωθεν*; a new origin is created.²³

Can attentive readers understand this point? Probably not before rereading. Why would our evangelist put readers, attentive or not, through such a process of pondering the riddle of how the spirit works? A brief review of other attempts to wrestle with the issue of divine sovereignty and human responsibility might suggest an answer.

The Scrolls

Analysis of the “determinist” elements in the Dead Sea Scrolls provides useful background for the gospel’s position.²⁴ As often noted, the position(s) represented in the Scrolls are rooted in Biblical affirmations about the

22 So B.G. Schuchard, *Scripture within Scripture: The Interrelationship of Form and Function in the Explicit Old Testament Citations in the Gospel of John* (SBLDS 133; Atlanta: Scholars, 1992) 100–101, doubted by Menken, “He Has Blinded,” 110. Menken’s construal leaves a predetermining God who hardens hearts, yet inexplicably leaves room (122) for human “moral” responsibility.

23 The moves here are anticipated in John 5:41–44, where Jesus reacts to adversaries who do not understand the testimony of scripture, but accept testimony from those who “come in their own name.” Their failure results from valuing *δόξα* (“acclaim”) from human beings and not having “the love of God in them” (v 42).

24 In general and for earlier literature, see M. Broshi, “Predestination in the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in idem, *Bread, Wine, Walls, and Scrolls* (JSPESup 46; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001) 238–251; E.O. Tukasi, *Determinism and Petitionary Prayer in John and the Dead Sea Scrolls: An Ideological Reading of John and the Rule of the Community* (1QS) (LSTS 66; London, New York: T&T Clark, 2008); J. Leonhardt-Balzer, “Evil Dualism and

creator's sovereignty, passages such as Prov 3:19–26; 16:4, or Qoh 6:10, or Ben Sira 33:10–15.²⁵ Some passages, such as Ben Sira's comparison of human beings to "clay in the potter's hand" sound predestinarian, they are more likely a description of two ethical dispositions, a traditional part of sapiential admonitions.

This sapiential tradition also appears in some of the Scrolls, particularly 4QInstruction (4Q415–4Q418a, 4Q423), which probably antedates the foundation of the Yahad.²⁶ Texts such as 4Q417 I i (= 4QSAP A) contain the different strands of Second Temple sensibility that will fuse into the Yahad's distinctive doctrine. The old divide between truth and injustice, good and evil is fundamental. For this author a mysterious divine plan, "engraved" in a "memorial written before him" rules all things:

For the God of knowledge is the foundation of truth,
And through the approaching mystery (the רז נהיה)²⁷
He set apart its foundation,
The work of [His hands] . . .
. . . and in pure understanding were revealed
. . . the secrets of his thought
with his perfect conduct in all his deeds.

The ingredients of the distinctive teaching of the Instruction on Two Ways are here, but not combined into a rigid determinism. Instead, 4Q417 finds room for moral exhortation and can admonish the "son of understanding" not to be "touched by wickedness".²⁸

Community: Who/What did the Yahad Not Want to Be," in G.G. Xeravits, ed., *Dualism in Qumran* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 121–147.

25 See the treatment of these texts by Lange, *Weisheit*, 32–40. On Qoheleth, see O. Kaiser, "Determinatio und Freiheit bei Kohelet / Prediger Salomo und in der Frühen Stoa," *NZSth* 31 (1989), 251–270.

26 For the consensus on a mid second-century date and the recent arguments in favor of a later date, see J.J. Collins, *The Dead Sea Scrolls, a Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 67–77.

27 On the curious technical term, see now J. Ashton, "Mystery' in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Fourth Gospel," in M. Coloe and T. Thatcher, eds., *John, Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Early Judaism and Its Literature 32; Atlanta: SBL, 2011), 53–68. Ashton translates רז נהיה as "the mystery that is coming to pass."

28 On the relationship of 4QInstruction to 1QS and 1QH, see E.J.C. Tigchelaar, *To Increase Learning for the Understanding Ones: Reading and Reconstructing the Fragmentary Early Jewish Sapiential Text 4QInstruction* (STDJ 44; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 194–207.

A related text 4QMyst (= 4Q299–301, 1Q27) seems to reflect the same general configuration of ingredients, a notion of a Divine plan, designated with the distinctive “mystery that is to come,” a sharp division between the good and wise vs. the evil and foolish, and, additionally, an eschatological expectation that the latter will be eliminated.

4 They know not the mystery to come, nor do they understand the things of the past. They know not that which shall befall them, nor do they save their soul from the mystery to come.

5 And this shall be the sign for you that these things shall come to pass. When the breed of iniquity is shut up. Wickedness shall then be banished by righteousness as darkness is banished by the light. As smoke clears and is no more, so shall wickedness perish for ever and righteousness be revealed like a sun governing the world. All who cleave to the mysteries of sin shall be no more; knowledge shall fill the world and folly shall exist no longer. (1Q27 & 4Q300, Trans. Vermes, 2011, 408–09; Parry and Tov 4:233).

The texts so far reviewed provide raw materials, but not the synthesis, unique to the Scrolls, found in the *Instruction on the Two Spirits*.²⁹ This well-known text (1QS 3.13–4.26) has a complete package of ingredients suitable for a doctrine of predestination: a God in ultimate control of all, who has determined times and seasons and created two ruling spirits. The cosmic division is mirrored on two levels relevant to humankind, the social, where the sons of light oppose the sons of darkness, each characterized by virtues and vices, and the individual, in human hearts and souls where the struggle between the two spirits continues. The struggle on the individual level, similar to the Rabbinic notion of the *יצר הטוב* and the *יצר הרע*, might suggest that the scheme is similar to that of the Gospel of John, allowing some small space for human responsibility. But, at least in the *Instruction*, the outcome on every level is pre-determined by the preponderance of portions of Truth or Falsehood, Light or Darkness, in the individual.³⁰ The position seems to be clear and consistent;³¹ the textual

29 For an insightful general treatment of the text, see C. Newsom, *The Self as Symbolic Space* (STDJ 52; Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2004), 77–90.

30 As Newsom, *The Self*, 85 (see n. 28 above), puts it: “The capacity to respond to such appeals (to virtue or to vice) is disclosed in 1 QS 3–4 to be a matter of the degree of ‘inheritance’ each person has in the two spirits.”

31 See P.S. Alexander, “Predestination and Free Will in the Theology of the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in J.M.G. Barclay and S.J. Gathercole, eds., *Divine and Human Agency in Paul and His*

history of the text is still under discussion. The *Instruction on the Two Ways* is found in only one manuscript of 1QS. Whether the *Instruction* was added to an early form of the Rule or not copied in all manuscripts is not an issue to be resolved here.³²

The position of the *Instruction* finds echoes in other texts reflecting the values of the Yahad. These include the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, 4Q402 4 12–15:

For from the God of knowledge comes all that exists forever, and from His knowledge [and] his [plan]s have come into existence all eternally fixed times. He makes the former things [at] their [time]s and the latter things at their appointed times. And there are none among those who have knowledge (who can) discern the [wondrous] revealed things before He acts. And when He acts no one of the [... of] God can comprehend what He plans. For they are part of His glorious works. Before they came into being [(they were) part of] his [though]t³³

Or again, in the Hodayoth 1QH 7 (formerly 15), 14–20

I know through the understanding which comes from Thee
 That righteousness is not in a hand of flesh,
 [that] man [is not master of] his way
 and that it is not in mortals to direct their step.
 I know that the inclination (יצר) of every spirit
 [is in Thy hand];
 Thou didst establish הכינותה [all] its [ways] before ever creating it,
 and how can any man change Thy words?

Cultural Environment (LNTS; London T&T Clark, 2006) 27–49. On the status of the “Two Spirits” and whether the cosmic or psychological dimensions should be accorded greater weight; see M. Popovic, “Light and Darkness in the Treatise on the Two Spirits (1 QS III 13–IV 26) and in 4Q 186,” in Xeravits, ed., *Dualism in Qumran* (London: T&T Clark, 2010) 148–165, esp. 153.

32 Alexander, “Predestination,” 39, criticizes Sarianna Metzso’s reconstruction of the history of the Rule, on the grounds that the mss lacking the *Instruction*, 4Q5b and 4Q5d, are later than 1QS.

33 Alexander, “Predestination,” 42: “What we have here is, on the face of it, a doctrine of general rather than particular predestination, of the sort that Josephus attributes to the Essenes (*Ant.* 13.172), but within the theology of the Sabbath Songs it may have shaded over into a doctrine of particular predestination.” “The supreme knowledge to which one can attain is not only to know that there is a divine purpose to the world, but also to know and accept one’s place within it.”

Thou alone didst [create] the just
 and establish him from the womb
 for the time of goodwill,
 that he might hearken to Thy Covenant
 And walk in all (Thy ways),
 and that [Thou mightiest show Thyself great] to him
 in the multitude of Thy mercies,
 and enlarge his straitened soul to eternal salvation,
 to perpetual and unending peace.
 Thou wilt raise up his glory
 from among flesh.
 But the wicked Thou didst create בראתה
 for [the time] of Thy [wrath],
 Thou didst vow them from the womb
 to the Day of Massacre,
 for they walk in the way which is not good.
 They have despised [Thy Covenant]
 and their souls have loathed Thy [truth];
 they have taken no delight in all Thy commandments
 and have chosen that which Thou hatest ויבחרו באשר שנאתה
 [For according to the mysteries] of Thy [wisdom],
 Thou hast ordained them for great chastisements³⁴
 before the eyes of all Thy creatures,
 that [for all] eternity
 they may serve as a sign [and a wonder],
 and that [all men] may know Thy glory
 and Thy tremendous power.³⁵

The same doctrine is found in the Damascus Document:

Hear now, all you who enter the Covenant, and I will unstop your ears concerning the ways of the wicked.

God loves knowledge. Wisdom and understanding He has set before Him, and prudence and knowledge serve Him. Patience and much forgiveness are with Him towards those who turn from transgression; but power, might and great flaming wrath by the hand of all the Angels of Destruction towards those who depart from the way and abhor the

34 Parry and Tov, 5:13 "You have prepared them to execute great judgments among them."

35 Vermes, 2011, 255–56.

Precept. They shall have no remnant or survivor. For from the beginning God chose them not; He knew their deeds before ever they were created and He hated their generations, and He hid His face from the Land until they were consumed. For He knew the years of their coming and the length and exact duration of their times for all ages to come and throughout eternity. He knew the happenings of their times throughout all the everlasting years. And in all of them He raised for Himself men called by name that a remnant might be left to the Land, and that the face of the earth might be filled with their seed. And He made known His Holy Spirit to them by the hand of His anointed ones, and He proclaimed the truth (to them). But those whom He hated He led astray.³⁶

Other texts, such as *Astrological Physignomy*, 4Q186, have been suggested as loci of the doctrine,³⁷ but this interpretation apparently ignores the conventions of astrology that are involved in the text.³⁸

Some Points of Comparison

Nothing in the Fourth Gospel matches the clarity and consistency found in some of the key passages of the Scrolls, particularly in 1QS. Like the sages at Qumran, and their sapiential predecessors, John wants to ascribe a major role in the salvific process to the God who is sovereign over all. Like the sectarians at Qumran, the author of the Fourth Gospel also has to explain a contemporary situation that seems to stand in defiance of that Divine sovereignty. For the sectarians, the Temple that God had chosen was defiled by a defective calendar, improper rules of purity, and perhaps an inappropriate priesthood. How can this be? It is all part of the divine plan and things will work out in the end. For the evangelist, those who were supposed to “get” the message of Jesus did not do. How can this be? It is all part of the divine plan. How things will work

36 CD 2.3–12, Vermes 2011, 130. Alexander, “Predestination,” 42–44: “There is, it seems, a fixed, predetermined list of the righteous, and through ‘those anointed in his holy spirit and who view his truth’ God has made known to the elect the names of those who are to be saved. The language is cryptic but it seems to imply that in practical terms discerning who is and who is not of the elect lies with the spirit-inspired leadership of the community.”

37 Alexander, “Predestination,” 39–42, and “Physiognomy, Initiation and Rank in the Qumran Community,” in H. Cancik, H. Lichtenberger and P. Schäfer, eds., *Geschichte–Tradition–Reflexion: Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag* (3 vols.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 1:385–394.

38 See Popovic, “Light and Darkness.”

out in the end is not clear, but they surely will and those who come to Jesus will rise again on the last day.

Yet despite general similarities in form and function between the Scrolls and the Gospel, the differences between them are not simply a matter of lack of clarity. John's position about the relationship between Divine sovereignty and human responsibility seems to be more like that of the rabbis. While most things are in the hands of God, not everything is. It is still incumbent on anyone who encounters Christ to learn to love wisely and embrace the love that offers itself abundantly. The whole Gospel is structured not only to tell that tale, but to illustrate the process by which it happens.

In addition to a fundamental difference in what is at stake, there is a striking difference in the way the teaching progresses. Nothing in the Scrolls matches the Gospel's effort found to lead a reader (or rereader) through the process of exploring the complex relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

Another Comparandum

Is there anything that might explain the difference between the two sets of texts? One other model may have been at work, from the other major system of thought in antiquity that wrestled with the issue, Stoicism. There has been considerable recent discussion about Stoicism's possible influence on the Fourth Gospel.³⁹ Whether or not there was any direct influence, there is at least a remarkable similarity on certain key points. One of those points is the understanding of the relationship between divine determinism and human responsibility.

Something different, of course, is meant by divine determinism within Stoicism and the Biblical tradition, yet the rational force that Stoics call Zeus functions in a way that constrains human behaviour in much the same way as the divine will seems, at least on the surface, to function in John. Yet, like our evangelist, even the most rigidly determinist Stoics find room for human responsibility. How is that possible?

39 See G. Buch-Hansen, *"It Is the Spirit That Gives Life": A Stoic Understanding of Pneuma in John's Gospel* (BZNW 173; Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 2010); T. Engberg-Pedersen, "Logos and Pneuma in the Fourth Gospel," in D.E. Aune and F.E. Brenk, eds., *Greco-Roman Culture and the New Testament: Studies Commemorating the Centennial of the Pontifical Biblical Institute* (NovTSup 143; Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2012), 27–48.

Critics, either skeptical Platonists or dogmatic Epicureans, did not think that it was possible, and constantly chastized Stoics for eliminating human responsibility. Stoics said they had not done so.⁴⁰ The chief Stoic protagonist was Chrysippus, who developed the school's distinctive metaphysical positions, elaborating a common notion of Fate found in traditional Greek thought into the determinism that characterized classic Stoicism. The development, by the way, looks a good deal like what is found in the Jewish tradition when traditional sapiential positions developed into the determinism of the scrolls. Yet, within this systematic structure, Chrysippus wanted to maintain a framework for ethics that would allow for human responsibility.

How he did so is attested in several ancient sources, chiefly Cicero's *De fato*. In *De fato* 39–43, Quintus Cicero argues that Chrysippus wanted to be the “unofficial umpire” (*arbiter honorarius*) between the extremes of determinism and free will. He wanted, that is, to maintain that nothing is without a cause without positing a necessity that would eliminate moral responsibility. To do so he distinguished between types of causes, primary and auxiliary. What is involved in a human being's moral decision is an act of assent by the soul's ruling element, the *hegemonikon*, to an external stimulus:

For although assent (*adsensio*) cannot occur unless it is prompted by an impression, nevertheless, since it has that impression as its proximate, not its primary cause, Chrysippus wants it to have the rationale which I mentioned just now. He does not want assent, at least, to be able to occur without the stimulus of some external force (for assent must be prompted by an impression). But he resorts to his cylinder and spinning-top: these cannot begin to move without a push; but once that has happened, he holds that it is thereafter through their own nature that the cylinder rolls and the top spins.

Long and Sedley (393) aptly summarize:

A man's moral character is the primary cause of his performing good or bad acts. Each act additionally requires a triggering cause, normally in the form of a sense-impression, since all acts are somehow responses to external circumstances. But because the major share of the responsibility belongs to the primary cause, the triggering cause cannot itself be said to necessitate the assent which initiates his action.

40 For the analysis here, see A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (2 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 1:333–43, 386–394.

The theory of causation that Chrysippus devised does not avoid philosophical dilemmas; the “nature” of the spinning top might be just as fully a determining force as any external impulse. Other Stoics would, therefore, develop the theory further, trying to make fine distinctions in the levels of causation that would allow for human freedom.⁴¹

Summary John and the Stoics

What underlies the Fourth Gospel's reflection on accepting or rejecting Jesus is something very much like what Chrysippus envisioned, with interesting modifications.⁴² The whole process is in the hands of the Father and reflects his saving will. Where human beings wind up is a function of where they begin; there are no uncaused outcomes. Yet the point of origin, the cause of the outcome, can be reset, not exactly Stoic language. The process of “resetting” has a mysterious quality, but that mystery can be unpacked. It begins with the action of the Spirit of God that attracts people, inviting them to “see” or “believe” its glorious Truth. Whether or not they see is, however, not determined by that Spirit itself, but is a function of what they love. Their own love, for which they are responsible, defines their vision. For the evangelist, the equivalent of the Stoics’ “assent” is “belief” and the equivalent of the “nature” of the one assenting is “love.”

A critic could respond to this scheme of things as she could with the Stoic system. Is there perhaps something that determines what someone loves? Perhaps, but for the evangelist there is nothing more fundamental than love, either as a theological or an anthropological category.

41 See especially Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 8.9.33.1–9 (SVF 2.351).

42 The Dead Sea sectarians and the Stoics, of course, were not alone in worrying about the general issue of the relationship between human responsibility and divine sovereignty, but they do represent very distinctive positions on the subject and hence represent useful tools for thinking comparison with the Fourth Gospel. On the general subject, see also, for Paul, T. Eskola, *Theodicy and Predestination in Pauline Soteriology* (WUNT 2.100; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), and, for Josephus, J. Klawans, *Josephus and the Theologies of Ancient Judaism* (New York: Oxford, 2012).