

Calcidius on Fate

Power Point by Bernadette Brady

Calcidius was a fourth century Christian who translated the first part (to 53c) of Plato's *Timaeus* from Greek into Latin around the year 321 and provided with it an extensive commentary.

According to Grant, Calcidius' translation of the *Timaeus* was the only extensive text of Plato in the west for 800 years.

Edward Grant, (2004), *Science and Religion, 400 B.C. to A.D. 1550*, pages 93–4. Greenwood Publishing Group

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Rank – Providence proceeds Fate. God establish the world then created the souls and linked them to stars. Providence is first. The events that happen to the souls is fate. Fate is in accord with Providence. Not the other way round.

But Providence and Fate are really one, when it is God's will it is Providence when it is the causal chain we call it Fate.

Calcidius states that Chrysippus saw fate and providence as one but that Cleanthes saw that which is Providence is also Fate but that which is Fate is not Providence.

Divine and intelligent things are ruled by Providence alone, but natural and corporeal things are ruled by Fate. [1]

Boeft, J.Den. *Calcidius on Fate*. Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1970.

Providence and Fate

Providence's role is to establish the order of the cosmos and establish the creation of souls and link them to stars. Thus Providence establishes the Laws of Unalterable Decree. But the Laws themselves are Fate.

Fate is limited. Fate is ruled by time. Time is defined as a circle and all things are bound to return to their previous conditions. **Fate** is bound and limited thus contained within time.

If **Fate** was infinite then it is outside the divine order and thus chaotic. But **Fate** is order thus **Fate** is limited and contained within the divine sphere of Order. Also if Fate is divine then it is law and it therefore cannot be formless, hence it must be limited.

Calcidius suggests that we have origination but once we originate and act then there are consequences by necessity – Fate.



“So the World Soul
is Fate in substance”

Paragraph 152.

Calcidius argues for **Free Will** in the following way.

Plato's mythology is secularized and reincarnation is done away with. The free will given to the soul to choose its next life time is transposed to the earthly realm.

Calcidius uses this to show that we have Free Will. He states Virtue is independent and not subject to any form of necessity.

Calcidius expands his thinking on free will and fate and states that there are three parts to life. The tripartite life - the Possible, the Necessary and the Contingent.

Everything that is Possible is either **Necessary** or **Contingent**. Necessary is all that is when the contra position is not possible. All that lives will die – death is thus under the definition of the Necessary.

Contingent is when that which will happen could also have the alternative event. It will rain after sunset is contingent because it is possible that it will not rain after sunset.

Contingent events have two forms. That which happens often (preferred pathway) and that which happens rarely. The role of the astrologer or diviner is to know the timing for when contingent things will happen.

“These things being so, divination stays unimpaired, so that no authority is being withdrawn from prognostication; in fact, someone who knows beforehand, can, when fate has instructed him in such a way, give advice either to undertake something or not to do so and the astrologer will correctly and rationally try to catch the right moment to undertake an act according to the favourable position of stars and constellations, so that if this will happen, that will be the result.”

[Paragraph 157]

Calcidius solution to God's Providence dismissing human free will

“God knows Necessity but not the Contingent. The definition of the contingent is that is it always changing and diverse. If God knew the contingent events then He would know something that by its nature is not yet known. Thus God knows the nature of Contingent but not the events of Contingent. God knows things by their nature.”

[Paragraph 162]