

“The study of ‘free will’ as a question in moral psychology lies at the heart of this compelling study of Clement of Alexandria, but Gibbons’ discussion ranges much more widely, tracing themes in ethics, cosmology and metaphysics. In doing so, Gibbons reveals just how extensively, and how creatively, Clement engaged with contemporary philosophical thought in his construction of Christian identity. It is remarkable, and regrettable, how little serious attention has been paid to Clement until now: this book shows both theologians and students of ancient philosophy how much they have to learn from him.”

– Professor George Boys-Stones, Durham University, UK

“Kathleen Gibbons demonstrates that Clement’s eclectic philosophical method is far more elaborate than has been commonly thought, since Clement not only construes key Christian doctrines through the lens of relevant pagan philosophical positions, especially Platonist and Stoic, but this construal amounts in turn to a distinct positioning within the contemporary philosophical debate. Gibbons’ book is a very welcome addition to the new appreciation of the philosophical character of early Christianity and should be read by students of late ancient philosophy and of early Christianity alike.”

– Professor George Karamanolis, University of Vienna, Austria

In *The Moral Psychology of Clement of Alexandria*, Kathleen Gibbons proposes a new approach to Clement’s moral philosophy and explores how his construction of Christianity’s relationship with Jewishness informed, and was informed by, his philosophical project. As one of the earliest Christian philosophers, Clement’s work has alternatively been treated as important for understanding the history of relations between Christianity and Judaism and between Christianity and pagan philosophy. This study argues that an adequate examination of his significance for the one requires an adequate examination of his significance for the other.

While the ancient claim that the writings of Moses were read by the philosophical schools was found in Jewish, Christian, and pagan authors, Gibbons demonstrates that Clement’s use of this claim shapes not only his justification of his authorial project, but also his philosophical argumentation. In explaining what he took to be the cosmological, metaphysical, and ethical implications of the doctrine that the supreme God is a lawgiver, Clement provided the theoretical justifications for his views on a range of issues that included martyrdom, sexual asceticism, the status of the law of Moses, and the relationship between divine providence and human autonomy. By contextualizing Clement’s discussions of volition against wider Greco-Roman debates about self-determination, it becomes possible to reinterpret the invocation of “free will” in early Christian heresiological discourse as part of a larger dispute about what human autonomy requires.

Kathleen Gibbons received her PhD from the University of Toronto, and subsequently taught at Wilfrid Laurier University. She is a lecturer in Religious Studies and Classics at Washington University at St Louis, Missouri, USA, and studies the intersections between ancient philosophy and early Christian discourse on topics including astrology, ethnography, and asceticism.