

DIVINE WILL
AND HUMAN
CHOICE

Freedom, Contingency, and Necessity
in Early Modern Reformed Thought

RICHARD A. MULLER



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For
Ethan, Marlea, and Anneliese

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Preface

This essay is one of those efforts that, like the now-proverbial Topsy, just grow'd. It was originally planned out as a research proposal leading to an essay for presentation as part of an educational workshop model in my advanced course on research methodology. Even at the initial research proposal stage, attempting to indicate a tentative thesis, current state of the question, problem to be resolved, tentative outline, and beginning bibliography, it appeared that the essay would, amoeba-like, grow too large and divide into two parts, of which I would develop one for the seminar. Of course, the creation of an outline for a projected essay that, on further reflection, would prove to be too large for a single essay, was a suitable object-lesson for a seminar on methodology! As I focused on the parts, each one itself an intellectual amoeba, further expansions and divisions occurred, but none seemed willing to go off on its own. Out of a proposed short study a monograph evolved. I gave up any attempt to separate out the parts as independent essays and concentrated on developing the whole.

The original idea for the project dates back, moreover, as far as 1999 when I met with the *Werkgezelschap Oude Gereformeerde Theologie* at Utrecht University and participated in some of the discussions that led initially to the symposium published as *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise* in 2001 and later on to the publication of their groundbreaking work, *Reformed Thought on Freedom* in 2010. During those years we debated differing readings of early modern Reformed understandings of necessity and contingency as well as the question of the impact of Duns Scotus and Scotism on Reformed orthodoxy. My circle of conversation was augmented in 2003 by the appearance of Paul Helm's response to the Utrecht group's understanding of synchronic contingency as a foundational Scotist conception intrinsic to Reformed orthodox formulations of the doctrine of human free choice. I have remained in dialogue with both sides of this debate and now, as then, find myself rather firmly somewhere in the middle. I have learned much from my Utrecht colleagues and much as well from an extensive correspondence with Paul Helm, but, as readers acquainted with the debate over synchronic contingency will readily recognize, despite considerable agreement with major aspects of the argumentation of all the contending parties, I have come to my own conclusions. Nonetheless, without these colleagues and my ongoing dialogue with them, I could not have written this essay.

The debate over these issues is itself important to the understanding of traditional approaches to human free choice in its relation to the divine knowledge and will and to the understanding of the Reformed tradition in its Reformation and orthodox-era developments. The question of freedom, contingency, and necessity lends itself to a focused examination of the thought of the Reformers and the Reformed orthodox on a much-controverted topic. It also offers a window into the ancient and medieval backgrounds of the question, into patterns of reception of that older heritage in and by the Reformed tradition, and into the discussion of which elements and which interpretation of those elements of the heritage, whether Aristotelian, Thomist, or Scotist, were adapted for use among the Reformed.

There are, of course, two fundamentally different ways to approach this material and these questions—a positive philosophical approach and an objectivistic historical one. If the questions are addressed from a positive philosophical approach, the task of the contemporary writer would be to assess the success or lack thereof of the philosophical arguments found in the sources. By way of example, if Thomas Aquinas or Francis Turretin were found to argue both a divine willing of all things and a human capacity for genuinely free choice, the philosophical task would be to analyze and pass judgment on the success of their attempt to do justice to both aspects of the question, the divine and the human, presumably on the basis of modern philosophical methods and assumptions. If, however, the questions are addressed in a historical manner, the task of the contemporary writer would be to identify and analyze the arguments in their original form and context for the sake of clarifying the intention of the original author, without forming any judgment as to the ultimate success of his argument for a modern audience—given that the criteria for forming such a judgment would be modern criteria that do not belong to the historical materials. By way of the same example of Aquinas and Turretin, the historical issue to be addressed is whether these thinkers did or did not propose arguments concerning divine willing and human freedom, how those arguments functioned given the criteria of their author’s own era, and how the arguments contributed to a tradition of argumentation on their particular subject.

In what follows I will take the latter approach, viewing the subject historically, beginning with the question of Aristotle’s role in the traditionary discussion, looking to the reception of Aristotle in the Middle Ages with specific reference to Aquinas and Scotus, and then passing on to an examination of early modern Reformed thought. Inasmuch as what follows is an exercise in intellectual history, I do not begin with *a priori* assumptions concerning what must be true either philosophically or theologically about necessity, contingency, and free choice. My sole interest is in analyzing what the sources say. I find the modern terminology of “isms” to be imprecise and confused. Nor, in what follows, do I advocate a determinist or indeterminist, a compatibilist, incompatibilist, or libertarian perspective. I do not make assumptions about what Reformed theology must claim—rather I attempt to identify what Reformed theologians have claimed.

It is also important to register what the present essay does not discuss, namely, the issue of grace and free choice in salvation. It does not touch on the perennial debate over monergism and synergism—and it ought to be clear that what can be called soteriological determinism does not presuppose either a physical or a metaphysical determinism of all actions and effects, just as it ought to be clear that the assumption of free choice in general quotidian matters (such as choosing to eat or not to eat a pastrami sandwich for lunch) does not require an assumption of free choice in matters of salvation. Peter Martyr Vermigli in the era of the Reformation and Francis Turretin in the era of orthodoxy offered perspicuous states of the question, noting that prior to the soteriological question of the relationship of human freedom to grace, there were other foundational issues, namely, the nature of necessity, contingency, and freedom in the human being generally considered, and the ongoing freedom of human beings, even in their fallen condition, to choose in their daily existence. The present essay is concerned with those foundational issues.

The issue to be addressed, then, is not whether the views of necessity, contingency, and freedom constitute, in the realm of modern philosophical argumentation, argumentation that offers a resolution of the issue of divine willing and human free choice that fulfills a contemporary philosophical need. Rather the question is whether the arguments found in the works of Aquinas, Scotus, and the early modern Reformed constituted in their own contexts and in view of their own concerns a basis for understanding that God in various ways causes all things to be and to be what they are and, at the same time, created human beings to have freedom of choice. I hope to shed light on the concept of synchronic contingency as well as question somewhat its revolutionary character, to illuminate the relationship of the early modern Reformed to the older tradition, and to describe the nature of Reformed thought on freedom as something other than what moderns reference under the terms “compatibilism” and “libertarianism.” I also hope to demonstrate that resolution of the debate over the Reformed position and over synchronic contingency can only occur when the logical argumentation concerning freedom, contingency, and necessity is placed in its proper theological and philosophical context, namely, Reformed understandings of the divine decree and providential concurrence, a fundamental point not registered in the debate between Vos and Helm.

I owe a special word of thanks both to my colleagues at Utrecht, Willem van Asselt, Anton Vos, Eef Dekker, Andreas Beck, and other members of the *Werkgezelschap* and to Paul Helm for ongoing correspondence concerning the issues raised in this essay. I am deeply indebted to David Sytsma of Tokyo Christian University for a very careful and insightful reading of the whole text and to Paul Helm for a series of comments on a penultimate draft—effort that in both cases have led to significant refinements in my argument. I also am grateful to the many students who have attended my graduate seminars at Calvin Theological Seminary during the years in which I have been working on the project for their careful

listening and excellent discussion. And, as various footnotes demonstrate, I am also indebted to students whose dissertations and published articles have contributed to my own knowledge of the field. As always, the librarians at the Meeter Center and Hekman Library have been of considerable assistance and, more recently, my colleagues in the gathering of PRDL, the Post-Reformation Digital Library, without the resources of which many of the early modern volumes cited in the following pages would not have been readily available.

As a final note, although scholarly discussion has moved beyond the initial encounter between Vos and Helm, I register my surprise at the absence of a broader debate among scholars over the issues raised by *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, at the same time that the book and its arguments for use of the language of synchronic contingency among the early modern Reformed have created some stir in the typically uninformed and jejune world of internet bloggers and self-publishers. There is, after all, a significant body of scholarship on synchronic contingency and related subjects among medieval theologians and philosophers—and it is surprising that the careful and detailed work of Vos and his associates to show the connections between early modern Reformed thought and its medieval backgrounds has not resulted in the development of a body of literature on the early modern situation approaching the density of the medieval scholarship.

In my preparatory research for what follows I have used several online databases and what I would describe as legitimate, academically credible resources. Rather than heap confusion on confusion and appear to be granting an undeserved credibility to their arguments and assertions, I have not cited the bloggers and self-publishers—although, given these comments, they may conclude that I am aware of their existence.

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“God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy Counsell of his own Will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass. Yet so, as thereby neither is God the Author of sin, nor is violence offered to the wil of the Creatures, nor is the Liberty or contingency of second Causes taken away but rather established. . . . Although in relation to the fore-knowledg and decree of God, the first Cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly: yet by the same Providence he ordereth them to fall out, according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely or contingently.”

Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), iii.1; v.2

Part I

Freedom and Necessity
in Reformed Thought:
The Contemporary Debate

1

Introduction: The Present State of the Question

1.1 Reformed Thought on Freedom, Contingency, and Necessity: Setting the Stage for Debate

Studies of the older Reformed theology, whether of Calvin or of “Calvinism,” particularly when the early modern debates over Arminius, Arminianism, and other forms of synergistic theology have been the focus of investigation, have quite consistently identified Reformed theology as a form of determinism. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the modern term “determinism” was not yet coined, debate over the Reformed understandings of predestination led early on to the accusations that Calvin and later Reformed writers taught a doctrine of Stoic fatalism and identified God as the author of sin—which, of course, they denied. Beginning in the late seventeenth and continuing into the eighteenth century, the language of the debate began to change with the alterations of philosophical language and Reformed theology came to be seen by its adversaries as a form of determinism, even though the philosophical underpinnings of the Reformed orthodox formulations concerning necessity, contingency, and freedom did not coincide with the philosophical assumptions of determinists of the era in the lineage of Hobbes or Spinoza.

The debate became significantly more complex as some Reformed thinkers of the eighteenth century adopted the premises of the new rationalist and mechanical philosophies and argued overtly in favor of a deterministic reading of Reformed doctrine.¹ The thought of Jonathan Edwards is paradigmatic of this new deter-

1. See George Hill, *Lectures in Divinity*, edited from his manuscript by his son, the Rev. Alexander Hill, minister of Dailly, from the second [Edinburgh] edition (Philadelphia: Herman Hooker, 1842), p. 599, citing positively Israel Gottlieb Canz, *Philosophiae Leibnitianae et Wolfiamae usus in theologia per*

minism,² and to the extent that Edwards has been identified as a “Calvinist,” his work accounts for much of the more recent identification of Reformed theology as deterministic.

The historiographical problem was complicated even further by the work of Alexander Schweizer, Heinrich Heppé, and J. H. Scholten in the nineteenth century, when predestination was identified as a central dogma from which Reformed theologians deduced an entire system.³ Among these writers, Schweizer also held that secondary causality was so subsumed under God’s primary causality as to leave God the only genuine actor or mover. Schweizer’s deterministic interpretation not only of Calvin but also of later Reformed orthodoxy was conflated with Heppé’s use of Beza’s *Tabula praedestinationis* as the outline of a theological system, yielding a view of scholastic Reformed orthodoxy as a highly philosophical and thoroughly deterministic system, ultimately becoming a prologue to, if not a form of, early modern rationalism.⁴

The actual reception and use of philosophy by the Protestant scholastics has been little examined by this older scholarship and, when examined, presented in a rather cursory manner often accompanied by highly negative dogmatic assessments.⁵ These

praecipua fidei capita, 2 vols. (Frankfurt: s.n., 1733–1735) and referencing such works as Daniel Wyttenbach, *Tentamen theologiae dogmaticae methodo scientifico pertractatae*, 3 vols. (Frankfurt: Joh. Benj. Andreae et Henr. Hort, 1747–1749); and Johann Friedrich Stapfer, *Grundlegung zur wahren Religion*, 12 vols. (Zürich, 1746–1753); idem, *Institutiones theologiae polemicae universae, ordine scientifico dispositae*, 4th ed., 5 vols. (Zürich: Heidegger, 1756–1757); and idem, *Theologia Analytica* (Bern: Typographica Illust. Reipublicae Bernensis, 1761).

2. Cf. George Park Fisher, “The Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards,” in *North American Review*, 128/268 (1879), pp. 289–293; Conrad Wright, “Edwards and the Arminians on the Freedom of the Will,” in *Harvard Theological Review*, 35/4 (1942), pp. 241–261; with Richard A. Muller, “Jonathan Edwards and the Absence of Free Choice: A Parting of Ways in the Reformed Tradition,” in *Jonathan Edwards Studies*, 1/1 (2011), pp. 3–22.

3. Thus, especially, Alexander Schewizer, *Die protestantischen Centraldogmen in ihrer Entwicklung innerhalb der reformierten Kirche*, 2 vols. (Zürich: Orell, Fussli, 1854–1856); J. H. Scholten, *De Leer der Hervormde Kerk in hare Grondbeginselen, uit de Bronnen Voorgegesteld en Beoordeeld*, 2 vols. (Leiden: P. Engels, 1848–1850), II, pp. 2–12; Heinrich Heppé, “Der Charakter der deutsch-reformirten Kirche und das Verhältniss derselben zum Luthertum und zum Calvinismus,” in *Theologische Studien und Kritiken*, 1850 (Heft 3), pp. 669–706.

4. Schweizer, *Glaubenslehre*, I, pp. 319–321, citing Zwingli, Calvin, Hyperius, Vermigli, Aretius, Wollébius, Heidegger, Rijssen, Maresius, and Alsted; cf. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/3, pp. 96–97; and note Beza’s *Tabula* as reproduced in Heppé, “Character,” p. 672 (in part); and idem, *Reformed Dogmatics Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources*, foreword by Karl Barth; revised and edited by Ernst Bizer; trans. by G. T. Thomson (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1950), pp. 147–148 (entire). For the issue of orthodoxy and rationalism, see Ernst Bizer, *Frühorthodoxie und Rationalismus* (Zürich: EVZ Verlag, 1963); and Hans Emil Weber, *Reformation, Orthodoxie und Rationalismus*, 2 vols. in 3 parts, (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1937–1951).

5. Thus, e.g., A. C. McGiffert, *Protestant Thought before Kant* (London, 1911; repr., New York: Harper & Row, 1961), pp. 145–147; Brian G. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth-Century France* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969); Ernst Bizer, “Die reformierte Orthodoxie und der Cartesianismus,” in *Zeitschrift für Theologie*

cursory examinations have often operated on the assumption that Protestant scholasticism can be identified simplistically as an Aristotelian-Thomistic inheritance. This inheritance has, moreover, been associated with the use of causal language—and that language, in turn, has been dogmatically interpreted as indicating a movement away from Reformation-era “christocentrism” toward a commitment to deterministic metaphysics. According to this line of scholarship, whereas Calvin’s predestinarianism was offset by christocentrism, later Reformed writers transformed the doctrine by relying on Aristotle and the scholastic tradition, notably on the Thomistic trajectories of that tradition.⁶

This kind of argumentation has remained typical of discussions of Reformed understandings of predestination, grace, and free choice. The Reformed or “Calvinists,” as they are all too frequently identified, have been viewed as pairing almost dualistically “the nothingness of man” with “the overmastering power of God,”⁷ and, accordingly, as teaching a fundamentally predestinarian or deterministic theology—whether in utter accord with Calvin’s thought or in a further, negative development of it. When, moreover, this determinism has been understood as a negative development, its problematic character has been typically associated with its scholastic patterns of argumentation.⁸

Despite a considerable amount of scholarship that has reassessed orthodox Reformed theology, these readings of scholasticism, Aristotelian philosophy, and the language of fourfold causality, together with the identification of Reformed thought as a form of determinism, indeed, as a predestinarian metaphysic, have continued to be made by critics of the older Reformed theology, whether Arminian or nominally Reformed.⁹ This reading of Reformed understandings of necessity and freedom has

und Kirche (1958), pp. 306–372; in translation, “Reformed Orthodoxy and Cartesianism,” trans. Chalmers MacCormick, in *Translating Theology into the Modern Age: Historical, Systematic, and Pastoral Reflections on Theology and the Church in the Contemporary Situation*, vol. 2 of *Journal for Theology and the Church*, ed. Robert W. Funk and Gerhard Ebeling (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 20–82.

6. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, pp. 129–132, 136–138, 162–164, 178–179; Otto Gründler, “Thomism and Calvinism in the Theology of Girolamo Zanchi (1516–1590)” (ThD dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1961), pp. 21–23, 122–123, 159, et passim; subsequently published as *Die Gotteslehre Girolami Zanchis und ihre Bedeutung für seine Lehre von der Prädestination* (Neukirchen: Neukirchner Verlag, 1965); similarly, Ernst Bizer, *Frühorthodoxie und Rationalismus*, pp. 42, 62; and cf. the comments on Bizer in David Sytsma, “Calvin, Daneau, and *Physica Mosaica*: Neglected Continuities at the Origins of an Early Modern Tradition,” in *Church History and Religious Culture*, 95 (2015), pp. 457–476, here, p. 460.

7. McGiffert, *Protestant Thought before Kant*, p. 86.

8. Cf. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, pp. 30–40, 127–140; Gründler, “Thomism and Calvinism in the Theology of Girolamo Zanchi,” pp. 21–23, 132–151, 158–159, et passim; with James Daane, *The Freedom of God: A Study of Election and Pulpit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), pp. 45–73.

9. E.g., William L. Craig, *The Only Wise God*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), p. 15; Roger E. Olson, *Against Calvinism*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), pp. 15–70; Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), pp. 8–9; Jack W.

also been affirmed by various modern Reformed writers who advocate a determinist or, as it has more recently been identified, compatibilist line of theological formulation, often in the line of Jonathan Edwards.¹⁰ These assumptions about the deterministic nature of Calvinism have been absorbed both positively and negatively in much modern literature on the subject of divine will and its relationship to human free choice with the result that Calvinist or Reformed thought has been described, almost uniformly, by both opponents and advocates, as a kind of determinism, often compatibilism or soft determinism—with little or no concern for the possible anachronistic application of the terms.¹¹

In short, an understanding of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed theology as a variety of fatalism or determinism, despite early modern Reformed claims to the contrary, became the dominant line in modern discussion. Arguably, this line of thought is prevalent because of the loss of fluency in the scholastic language of the early modern Reformed, particularly in the distinctions used to reconcile the divine willing of all things, the sovereignty of grace, and overarching divine providence with contingency and freedom, not merely epistemically but ontically understood as the possibility for things and effects to be otherwise. In addition, not a few of the proponents and critics of the Reformed doctrine of free choice and divine willing have confused the specifically soteriological determination

Cottrell, “The Nature of the Divine Sovereignty,” in *The Grace of God, The Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), pp. 97–119; Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, trans. Darrell Guder, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981–1982), I, p. 602; II, pp. 420–421; and Thomas F. Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1980), p. 146.

10. For positive arguments for compatibilism or determinism, see William Hastie, *The Theology of the Reformed Church in its Fundamental Principles* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1904), pp. 142–166; H. Henry Meeter, *The Fundamental Principle of Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1930); John S. Feinberg, “God, Freedom and Evil in Calvinist Thinking,” in *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will*, ed. Thomas E. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), II, pp. 459–483; Steven B. Cowan, “Common Misconceptions of Evangelicals regarding Calvinism,” in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 33/2 (1990), pp. 189–196, here, pp. 193–195; and, with reference both to Calvin and Turretin, Paul Helm, “The Augustinian-Calvinist View,” in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), pp. 161–189.

11. Cf. on the positive side, e.g., John S. Feinberg, “And the Atheist Shall Lie Down with the Calvinist: Atheism, Calvinism and the Free Will Defense,” in *Trinity Journal*, 1 (1980), pp. 142–152; idem, “God, Freedom and Evil in Calvinistic Thinking,” in Schreiner and Ware, eds., *Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will*, pp. 463–464; and idem, *No One like Him* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), p. 651; Steven B. Cowan, “Common Misconceptions of Evangelicals Regarding Calvinism,” in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 33/2 (1990), pp. 189–195; Paul Helm, “‘Structural Indifference’ and Compatibilism in Reformed Orthodoxy,” in *Journal of Reformed Theology*, 5 (2011), pp. 186, 201–205. On the negative side, e.g., Jack W. Cottrell, “The Nature of the Divine Sovereignty,” in *The Grace of God, the Will of Man: A Case for Arminianism*. Ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), pp. 97–102; in *ibid.*, Bruce Reichenbach, “Freedom, Justice, and Moral Responsibility,” pp. 281–283; and Jerry L. Walls and Joseph R. Dongell, *Why I Am Not a Calvinist* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), pp. 114–118, 133, 136, 149–150, et passim.

of the Reformed doctrine of predestination with a “divine determinism of all human actions,” presumably including such actions as buttering one’s toast in the morning or taking what Jeremy Bentham once called an “anteprandial circumgyration” of his garden.¹²

More recent work on Protestant scholasticism has drawn a rather different picture. Various scholars have argued a fairly continuous development of Western thought from the later Middle Ages into the early modern era and have argued that there is a clear doctrinal continuity between the Reformation and the later orthodox theologies, particularly when examined in terms of the confessional writings of the era. Typical of these studies has been their attention to the actual nature of scholasticism as primarily a method rather than as a determiner of doctrinal content.¹³ They have also recognized that scholastic method was a rather fluid phenomenon with its own lines of development—with the result that the scholasticism of the seventeenth century cannot be seen as a simple return to medieval models.¹⁴ Attention has also been paid to the nature of the Reformed tradition as rooted broadly in the Reformation and as developing into a fairly diverse movement, albeit within confessional boundaries,¹⁵ with the result that a naive characterization of Reformed theology as “Calvinistic” and measured almost solely by its relation to Calvin’s *Institutes* has been called into question.¹⁶

Several of these studies, moreover, have drawn on the concept of “simultaneous” or “synchronic contingency” to argue that developing Reformed theology in the seventeenth century held a rather robust theory of human free choice, in continuity

12. The phrase is from Bruce R. Reichenbach, “Freedom, Justice, and Moral Responsibility,” in Pinnock, ed., *Grace of God, the Will of Man*, p. 291; cf. my comments in Richard A. Muller, “Grace, Election, and Contingent Choice: Arminius’ Gambit and the Reformed Response,” in Schreiner and Ware, eds., *Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will*, pp. 251–278, here, pp. 269–277.

13. The issue, of course, is not that method and content can be neatly separated, rather it concerns the nature of the method itself and the ways in which it does and does not affect content: see Richard A. Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition: On the Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), pp. 24–33; also note idem, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins*, reissued, with a new preface (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), pp. ix–x, 11–12.

14. See, e.g., Carl Trueman and R. Scott Clark, eds., *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999); Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Willem J. van Asselt with T. Theo J. Pleizier, Pieter L. Rouwendal, and Maarten Wisse, *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*, trans. Albert Gootjes, foreword by Richard A. Muller (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011).

15. See the essays in Michael A. G. Haykin and Mark Jones, eds., *Drawn into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011).

16. Cf. Richard A. Muller, “Demoting Calvin? The Issue of Calvin and the Reformed Tradition,” in *John Calvin: Myth and Reality: Images and Impact of Geneva’s Reformer*, ed. Amy Nelson Burnett (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2011), pp. 3–17; with idem, “Was Calvin a Calvinist?” in Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition*, pp. 51–69.

with various lines of argumentation found among the late medieval scholastics and the early modern Dominicans.¹⁷ Nor ought it to be assumed that developing Reformed theology was monolithic on the issue—among the Reformed there were varied definitions of freedom and diverse appropriations of the older tradition.¹⁸ Identification of the scholastic Reformed approach to human freedom with the compatibilistic views of Jonathan Edwards has also been drawn into question.¹⁹

These differing views of Calvin, Calvinism, and Reformed orthodoxy correspond with shifts in the historiography on the nature and character of confessional orthodoxy, its scholastic method, and its relationship to the older Christian tradition in its appropriation of Aristotelian or Peripatetic philosophy. In much of the older scholarship, the theology of the Reformers has been represented as antithetical to scholasticism and to Aristotelian philosophy and as opposed to various forms of speculation and philosophical argumentation. Accordingly, the rather positive relationship of early modern Protestant scholasticism to traditional, largely Peripatetic, forms of Christian philosophy has typically been presented in equally negative terms on the basis of the twin assumptions that the Reformation set aside the long-standing relationship between theology and what can loosely be called Christian Aristotelianism and that the fundamental recourse, identifiable among the Protestant scholastic theologians of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, to this older mode of dialogue, debate, and formulation between theology

17. Most notably, Willem J. van Asselt, J. Martijn Bac, and Roelf T. te Velde, trans., eds., and commentary, *Reformed Thought on Freedom: The Concept of Free Choice in the History of Early-Modern Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), pp. 36–38, citing Philip van Limborch, *Theologia Christiana ad praxin pistatis ac promo*; and also T. Theo J. Pleizier, “Dependent Freedom. Francesco Turretini (1623–1687) on Human Freedom: An Analysis of ‘Choice,’ ‘Freedom’ and ‘Necessity’ in Locus Ten of the *Elencic Institutes*” (MA thesis: University of Utrecht, 2001); David Sytsma, “The Harvest of Thomist Anthropology: John Weemse’s Reformed Portrait of the Image of God” (ThM thesis, Calvin Theological Seminary, 2008), pp. 144–154; Jeongmo, Yoo, “John Edwards (1637–1716) on the Freedom of the Will: The Debate on the Relation between Divine Necessity and Human Freedom in the Seventeenth Century and Early Eighteenth Century England” (PhD dissertation, Calvin Theological Seminary, 2011). Given that the chapters in *Reformed Thought on Freedom* have different authors, subsequent references will cite the chapter titles, with their specific authors, to their respective paginations in *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, with the volume abbreviated as *RTF*. There are some differences in emphasis among the authors even though they identify *Reformed Thought on Freedom* as embodying “the most important results of [Antonie] Vos’ innovative research project” (p. 17). References to the texts translated in the volume will cite it as *Reformed Thought on Freedom*.

18. Cf. the comments in Richard A. Muller, “Goading the Determinists: Thomas Goad (1576–1638) on Necessity, Contingency and God’s Eternal Decree,” in *Mid-America Journal of Theology*, 26 (2016), pp. 59–75, here, p. 64–65, 69–70.

19. Cf. Muller, “Jonathan Edwards and the Absence of Free Choice,” pp. 3–22; with Fisher, “Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards,” pp. 289–293; Wright, “Edwards and the Arminians on the Freedom of the Will,” pp. 241–261; and Norman Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards’s Moral Thought and Its British Context* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), pp. 272–277.

and philosophy was little more than a problematic return to the norms of a rejected tradition.²⁰

Allied to the older view of Protestant scholasticism is the assumption, also representative of the older scholarship, that the philosophical tendency of early modern Reformed thought was toward a form of philosophical determinism—perhaps associated with a deterministic reading of Aristotle or, at least, with a deterministic understanding of causality as defined by the standard Aristotelian paradigm of efficient, formal, material, and final causes.²¹ Leaving aside the much-debated question of continuity or discontinuity between Calvin and later Calvinism, the Aristotelian philosophical assumptions of the Reformed orthodox have been understood either as developing and solidifying Calvin's already-deterministic understanding of predestination and free choice or as drawing Calvin's predestinarianism into a deterministic metaphysic.

Writers who argue this negative dogmatic assessment and the related assumption of a clear break with the philosophical and theological past engineered by the first and second generations of Reformers have been slow to absorb nearly a half century of revisionist scholarship that has rejected the sense of a neat dividing line between the Middle Ages and the era of the Reformation.²² This revisionist scholarship has identified significant medieval antecedents, both theological and philosophical, of Protestant thought in both the Reformation and the post-Reformation eras. It has identified continuities in doctrinal development between the Reformation and the era of post-Reformation orthodoxy, and it has documented not merely the maintenance but also the positive development of the Peripatetic tradition in

20. Cf., e.g., Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, pp. 31–33, 129–132, 136–139; Thomas F. Torrance, “Knowledge of God and Speech about Him According to John Calvin,” in *Theology in Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), p. 76; and, more recently, Charles Partee, *The Theology of John Calvin* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2008), pp. 3, 4, 25, 27.

21. See, e.g., Walter Kieckel, *Vernunft und Offenbarung bei Theodor Beza* (Neukirchen: Neukirchner Verlag, 1967); Basil Hall, “Calvin against the Calvinists,” in Gervase Duffield, ed., *John Calvin* (Appleford: Sutton Courtney Press, 1966), pp. 19–37; Johannes Dantine, “Das christologische Problem in Rahmen der Prädestinationslehre von Theodor Beza,” in *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, 77 (1966), pp. 81–96; and idem, “Les Tableaux sur la doctrine de la prédestination par Théodore de Bèze,” in *Revue de théologie et de philosophie*, 16 (1966), pp. 365–377. For further bibliography and critique of this position, see Muller, *After Calvin*, pp. 11–13, 63–102; and idem, “The Use and Abuse of a Document: Beza's *Tabula praedestinationis*, the Bolsec Controversy, and the Origins of Reformed Orthodoxy,” in *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment*, ed. Carl Trueman and Scott Clark (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999), pp. 33–61.

22. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 4, *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300–1700)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Stephen E. Ozment, *The Age of Reform, 1250–1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); both authors discard the notion of the beginning of the sixteenth century as the entrance into a new period in history.

Christian philosophy well into the seventeenth century.²³ Other recent studies have demonstrated the complex and often subtle relationships between early modern Reformed thought and the varied philosophical trajectories of the era—undermining further the simplistic association of Reformed thought with scholasticism and scholasticism with Aristotelianism.²⁴

Recent studies of the medieval and early modern language of “simultaneous” or “synchronic contingency,” already noted as adding a further dimension to the reassessment of Reformed orthodoxy, have raised a series of significant issues concerning the nature and content of later medieval thought and its reception by Protestant thinkers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Having accepted the often disputed readings of Aristotle and of later formulators of Christian Aristotelianism like Thomas Aquinas as determinists, they have argued a major moment of transition in understandings of necessity and contingency that took place in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, specifically, in the thought of John Duns Scotus. Scotus, in the words of one of these scholars, Antonie Vos, resolved the “masterproblem” of Western thought. Vos has also argued that the Scotistic resolution of this problem served as the basis for nearly all further discussion of necessity and contingency through the early modern era.²⁵

Vos’ interpretation of Aristotle, Aquinas, and Scotus, it needs be noted, stands in accord with the work of Jaakko Hintikka and Simo Knuutila on modal logic in the later Middle Ages.²⁶ Beyond this, according to Vos, Scotus’ resolution of the problem carried over into Reformed orthodoxy as its central identifying feature—in the words of another contributor to this line of thought, rendering Reformed orthodoxy a “perfect will theology,” understood as a Scotistic variant on the tradition of “perfect being theology” distinguished by a more nuanced understanding of divine agency.²⁷

23. See Charles B. Schmitt, “Towards a Reassessment of Renaissance Aristotelianism,” in *History of Science*, 11 (1973), pp. 159–193; idem, *Aristotle and the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

24. See Aza Goudriaan, *Reformed Orthodoxy and Philosophy, 1625–1750: Gisbertus Voetius, Petrus van Mastricht, and Anthonius Driessen* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2006); idem, ed., *Jacobus Revius: A Theological Examination of Cartesian Philosophy; Early Criticisms (1647)* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2002); David Sytsma, *Richard Baxter and the Mechanical Philosophers* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming); and note Richard A. Muller, “Reformation, Orthodoxy, ‘Christian Aristotelianism,’ and the Eclecticism of Early Modern Philosophy,” in *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis*, 81/3 (2001), pp. 306–325.

25. Antonie Vos, “Always on Time: The Immutability of God,” in *Understanding the Attributes of God*, ed. Gijsbert van den Brink and Marcel Sarot (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1999), p. 65; cf. idem, *The Philosophy of John Duns Scotus* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 611.

26. See in particular Jaakko Hintikka, *Time and Necessity: Studies in Aristotle’s Theory of Modality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973); and Simo Knuutila, *Modalities in Medieval Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1993).

27. Jacobus Martinus Bac, *Perfect Will Theology: Divine Agency in Reformed Scholasticism as Against Suárez, Episcopius, Descartes, and Spinoza* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2010), pp. 5–6, 12–21, et passim.

The most significant recent contribution to scholarship on the issue of freedom and determinism in the older Reformed theology is *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, edited by Willem J. Van Asselt, J. Martin Bac, Roelf T. te Velde, and a team of associates. The significance of the volume arises from the fact that it has taken a different approach to the materials and, accordingly, has quite radically altered the field of discussion. These scholars have argued that the orthodox, scholastic Reformed theology of the early modern era, as exemplified by such authors as Franciscus Junius, Franciscus Gomarus, Gisbertus Voetius, and Francis Turretin was not a form of determinism or compatibilism, nor, indeed, a form of libertarianism. They note that the Arminian critics of the older Reformed theology had argued that contingency and necessity are utterly opposed to one another and irreconcilable.²⁸ If this Arminian critique were correct, the authors argue, and necessity and contingency were utterly opposed, one would be “forced to be either a libertarian or a determinist.” The Reformed scholastics, however, rejected the critique and its premise, espousing a view that distinguished between absolute and relative necessity and arguing full creaturely dependence on God, a contingent world order, and human free choice.²⁹ The compilers of the volume point out from the very beginning of their study that a Reformed orthodox thinker such as Francis Turretin could state without qualification and without discarding his doctrines of predestination and providence that “we [the Reformed] establish free choice far more truly than our opponents.”³⁰ Further, they argue that the older, orthodox Reformed approach to reconciling necessity with contingency and freedom, follows out the modal logic of late medieval theories of simultaneous or synchronic contingency.³¹

28. Willem J. Van Asselt, J. Martin Bac, Roelf T. te Velde, and Marinus Schouten, “Introduction,” in *RTF*, pp. 36–38, citing Philip van Limborch, *Theologia Christiana ad praxin pistatis ac promotionem pacis Christianae unice directa* (Amsterdam: Henricus Wetstenius, 1686), II.viii.13: “Contradictoria sunt, libere seu contingenter quid & necessario fieri; nam libere ac contingens sit, quod potest non fieri, necessario autem quod non potest non fieri: Haec itaque nullo respectu conciliari potest.”

29. Van Asselt et al., “Introduction,” in *RTF*, pp. 15, 37. This understanding of contingency is either missed or utterly misunderstood by David Engelsma, Review Article: *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, in *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*, 49/1 (2015), pp. 94–106, here, p. 106, who assumes that affirmation of contingency indicates a dependence of God on human decisions.

30. Van Asselt, et al., “Introduction,” in *RTF*, p. 15, citing Francis Turretin, *Institutio theologiae elencticae, in qua status controversiae perspicue exponitur, praecipua orthodoxorum argumenta proponuntur, & vindicantur, & fontes solutionum aperiuntur*, 3 vols. (Geneva: Samuel de Tourmes, 1679-1685), X.i.3; note the translation, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, 3 vols. (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 1992–1997).

31. Van Asselt, et al., “Introduction,” in *RTF*, pp. 28, 30–43. There are several ways of defining “synchronic” or, as it also has been identified, “simultaneous contingency” and the alternative “diachronic,” “temporal,” or “statistical contingency.” Accordingly, “synchronic contingency means that for one moment of time, there is a true alternative for the state of affairs that actually occurs” (*ibid.*, p. 41). In this account, synchronic contingency may be defined as understanding contingency to be rooted in a present potency to be otherwise (or not to be); and diachronic contingency as understanding contingency to be rooted in a past possibility of being otherwise: the assumption is that according to synchronic contingency, the present moment is contingent, whereas according to

As will become clear in what follows, the point made by Van Asselt and his associates in *Reformed Thought on Freedom* that the older Reformed approach is neither a form of compatibilism nor a form of libertarianism, nor, indeed, a kind of deterministic incompatibilism, but a theory of “dependent freedom,” itself occupies a significant place in the discussion. The significance of the point is that it refuses the standard modern paradigm for discussing the issue of human freedom and divine determination and accordingly alters the terms of the discussion itself—over against a tendency to assert the modern paradigm and its terminology and to reduce the argument for synchronic contingency to a version of libertarianism.

Much of the alternative approach to the issue of contingency and freedom in *Reformed Thought on Freedom* depends on a historical argument that the seventeenth-century Reformed orthodox not only drew broadly on medieval scholastic theology, as has been readily acknowledged in much of the recent scholarship, but more specifically drew on Scotist thought for an understanding of the logic of divine willing, as analyzed primarily in the magisterial work of Antonie Vos.³² In the account of later medieval thought given by Vos, Duns Scotus’ thought on contingency, specifically, synchronic contingency, marked an epoch in Western theology and philosophy by finally setting aside the shadow of ancient philosophical determinism and demonstrating how the radical freedom of God in willing the world guarantees its contingency and opens a place for genuine creaturely freedom. Vos’ understanding of freedom and contingency underlies the argumentation of *Reformed Thought on Freedom* and has, more recently, provided much of the conceptual basis for a study of the divine will by J. Martin Bac, as also for an outline of the Reformed doctrine of God by Roelf Te Velde, and the analyses of Richard Baxter’s theology and Samuel Rutherford’s ethics by Simon Burton.³³

This reading of the older Reformed doctrine has been roundly critiqued, primarily by Paul Helm. Helm, who has argued at some length and in detail that Calvin held a compatibilist view of divine willing and human freedom,³⁴ understands a significant

diachronic contingency the present moment is necessary in the strict sense that it cannot be otherwise. The modifier “synchronic” is used specifically to indicate a view of contingency alternative to the theory that identifies contingency restrictively with temporal change. Cf. similarly, Antonie Vos, “Always on Time,” pp. 70–73.

32. Most notably in Antonie Vos, *The Philosophy of John Duns Scotus* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

33. Bac, *Perfect Will Theology*; Roelf T. te Velde, *Paths Beyond Tracing Out: The Connection of Method and Content in the Doctrine of God, Examined in Reformed Orthodoxy, Karl Barth, and the Utrecht School* (Delft: Eburon, 2010); and Simon J. G. Burton, *The Hollowing of Logic: The Trinitarian Method of Richard Baxter’s Methodus Theologiae* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2012); and idem, “Samuel Rutherford’s Euthyphro Dilemma: A Reformed Perspective on the Scholastic Natural Law Tradition,” in *Reformed Orthodoxy in Scotland: Essays on Scottish Theology, 1560–1775*, ed. Aaron Denlinger (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2014), pp. 135–136.

34. Paul Helm, Paul Helm, “Necessity, Contingency and the Freedom of God,” in *Journal of Reformed Theology*, 8 (2014), pp. 243–262; idem, *John Calvin’s Ideas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 157–183; idem, *Calvin at the Centre* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp.

continuity of thought between Calvin and the Reformed orthodox and, accordingly, has argued both that the Reformed orthodox did not adopt the theory of synchronic contingency and also that the concept itself provides no satisfactory explanation of human freedom and divine determination.³⁵ Helm's argumentation along these lines relates to his long-held view, in accord with much of the recent revisionist scholarship on the Reformed tradition, that Calvin's thought cannot be posed in a facile manner against later "Calvinist" thought.³⁶

The debate between the contributors to *Reformed Thought on Freedom* and Paul Helm is complicated, moreover, by what appears to be a fundamental disagreement over the terms of the debate itself. The assumption of the editors is that the modern categories of libertarianism and compatibilism (with the latter understood in a deterministic sense) do not exhaust the field: the older Reformed doctrine, in their view, corresponds neither with libertarian nor with compatibilist/determinist definitions. Helm's arguments, on the other hand, appear to accept the premise that necessity and causal or ontic contingency, understood as the inherent possibility for things and events to be otherwise, are incompatible and that, therefore, there is no third category of explanation between the libertarian and compatibilist options. As a result, Helm concludes that by denying that the Reformed orthodox were compatibilists, the contributors to *Reformed Thought on Freedom* must ultimately place the Reformed in the libertarian camp,³⁷ a conclusion that, as we have seen, they deny.

Helm's approach to Reformed orthodoxy has also encountered historical arguments, illustrated by eighteenth-century assessments and nineteenth-century controversy over the philosophy of Jonathan Edwards, to the effect that a major shift took place in fundamental understandings of necessity and contingency in Reformed thought in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.³⁸ These arguments understand Edwards as determinist in the line of Hobbes and Locke, who ruled out genuine contingency in the world order and, accordingly, also, reduced human freedom to spontaneity of will and absence of coercion. Edwards' view of human

227–272; and also idem, "Calvin and Bernard on Freedom and Necessity: A Reply to Brümmer," in *Religious Studies*, 30 (1994), pp. 457–465.

35. As in Paul Helm, "Synchronic Contingency in Reformed Scholasticism: A Note of Caution," in *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift*, 57/3 (2003), pp. 207–222; idem, "Reformed Thought and Freedom: Some Further Thoughts," in *Journal of Reformed Theology*, 4 (2010), pp. 185–207; idem, "Structural Indifference," in *Journal of Reformed Theology*, 5 (2011), pp. 184–205; and idem, Review of *Perfect Will Theology* by J. Martin Bac, in *Themelios*, 36/2 (2011), pp. 321–323.

36. Paul Helm, *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1982); idem, "Calvin and the Covenant: Unity and Continuity," in *Evangelical Quarterly*, 55 (1983), pp. 65–81; and idem, "Was Calvin a Federalist?" in *Reformed Theological Journal*, 10 (1994), pp. 47–59.

37. Helm, Review of *Perfect Will Theology*, p. 322.

38. Cf. Fisher, "Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards," pp. 289–293; Wright, "Edwards and the Arminians on the Freedom of the Will," pp. 241–261; with Muller, "Jonathan Edwards and the Absence of Free Choice," pp. 3–22.

freedom, therefore, is seen to be distinct from the traditional Reformed affirmation of contingency and freedom, which is argued as not limiting freedom to spontaneity and absence of coercion but as defining it in terms of genuine alternative possibilities belonging to the human faculties. Helm's response to this line of argument has been to offer a careful analysis of later Reformed thought, primarily that of Francis Turretin, that indicates a continuity of philosophical assumptions between Turretin and Edwards, with Turretin understood, like Edwards, as a compatibilist who disavows alternativity.³⁹

More recently, the debate has broadened somewhat to include a proposal by Oliver Crisp that some orthodox Reformed theologians actually advocated a form of libertarianism, or at least that libertarianism is not incompatible with the definitions found in the Westminster Confession of Faith. Crisp states that Reformed theology is "not necessarily committed to hard determinism" and allows for "free will in some sense," hardly a revolutionary claim. He then goes on to argue, however, that a "libertarian Calvinist" will affirm that God "ordains whatsoever comes to pass" but does not either determine or cause all things: some human acts are merely foreseen and permitted.⁴⁰ As Crisp recognizes, an understanding of some human acts as foreseen and permitted would fall outside the confessional boundaries of Reformed theology into what is normally thought of as Arminianism and, we add, would probably indicate a notion of unwilling permission that Calvin had explicitly repudiated. Crisp cites *Reformed Thought on Freedom* as arguing similarly that at least some Reformed theology is not determinist. He then goes on to indicate that "much Reformed theology . . . appears" also "to be consistent with theological compatibilism," at the same time that he identifies both Jonathan Edwards and Francis Turretin as "hard determinists," despite the argumentation of the authors of *Reformed Thought on Freedom* concerning Turretin, and despite the scholarship that has indicated significant differences between Turretin and Edwards.⁴¹ The resulting

39. Paul Helm, "Jonathan Edwards and a Parting of the Ways?" in *Jonathan Edwards Studies*, 4/1 (2014), pp. 42–60. Still, Helm does acknowledge philosophical differences between the older Reformed tradition and Edwards: see Paul Helm, "A Different Kind of Calvinism? Edwardseanism Compared with Older Forms of Reformed Thought," in *After Jonathan Edwards: The Courses of the New England Theology*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Douglas Sweeney (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 91–103. See further Richard A. Muller, "Jonathan Edwards and Francis Turretin on Necessity, Contingency, and Freedom of Will. In Response to Paul Helm," in *Jonathan Edwards Studies*, 4/3 (2014), pp. 266–285; and Helm's response, "Turretin and Edwards Once More," in *Jonathan Edwards Studies*, 4/3 (2014), pp. 286–296; and note, more recently, Paul Helm, "Francis Turretin and Jonathan Edwards on Contingency and Necessity," in *Learning from the Past: Essays on Reception, Catholicity and Dialogue in Honour of Anthony N. S. Lane*, ed. Richard Snoddy and Jon Balsarak (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), pp. 163–178.

40. Oliver D. Crisp, *Deviant Calvinism: Broadening Reformed Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), p. 71.

41. Crisp, *Deviant Calvinism*, p. 64; also note idem, "The Debate about Reformed Thought and Human Free Will," in *Journal of Reformed Theology*, 8/3 (2014), pp. 237–241; and idem, "John Girardeau: Libertarian Calvinist?" in *ibid.*, pp. 284–300; Crisp's argument is unconvincing,

impression is that, at least according to Crisp, variant versions of Reformed thought could be hard determinist, soft determinist or compatibilist, and libertarian. Apart from Crisp's stated intention to provoke debate and to argue for a broader Reformed tradition than has been typically admitted (all of which is quite positive), he fails to deal with the argument made by the authors of *Reformed Thought on Freedom* that early modern Reformed understandings of necessity, freedom, and contingency do not easily fit the categories of either libertarianism or compatibilism, not to mention hard determinism—and, accordingly, presses variant formulae found in Reformed thought into one or another of the modern categories. An alternative resolution to Crisp's somewhat artificially constructed conundrum is to argue, following the authors of *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, that neither the Reformed tradition nor the larger part of the earlier philosophical and theological tradition fits into these categories.

The questions raised by this debate have profound implications for the understanding of traditional Reformed theology as well as for the broader issue of philosophical and theological understandings of human freedom in general. As Keith Stanglin stated the issue in his review of *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, "This historical investigation issues a tacit challenge to modern Calvinists, especially to those who subscribe to a metaphysical determinism that brings with it intolerable theological conclusions," such as the identification of God as the author of sin and the removal of human moral responsibility.⁴² It also, by extension, issues a challenge to the Arminian critics of Calvinism—whose condemnations may actually miss the point of traditional Reformed thought on free choice.

1.2 Freedom, Necessity, and Protestant Scholasticism: A Multi-Layered Problem

Contemporary debate over the nature and character of Protestant Scholasticism, most recently over the traditionary backgrounds and patterns of address to the problem of freedom and necessity among the Reformed orthodox thinkers of the early modern era, has developed into a rich and multi-layered field of study, pressing beyond the more general issue of continuities, discontinuities, and developments extending from the later Middle Ages into the Reformation and post-Reformation eras to a series of more highly nuanced questions concerning specific trajectories of argumentation, some rooted in the intense inter-confessional debates of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries; others demanding scrutiny of the scholastic distinctions concerning the relationship of God and world, divine omnipotence and freedom, necessity and contingency as they were used and debated

particularly inasmuch as he fails to coordinate a clear understanding of "libertarianism" with what Girardeau proposes as the direction of early modern Reformed thought.

42. Keith D. Stanglin, Review of Van Asselt et al., *Reformed Thought on Freedom* in *Calvin Theological Journal*, 46/2 (2011), p. 421.

in the later Middle Ages; and still others extending through nearly the entire reach of Western intellectual history.

Specifying these questions roughly *a minimis ad maximis* also yields a series of overlapping scholarly problems, histories of scholarship, and states of questions, several of which have not to my knowledge been previously drawn together. Like the series of historical questions just noted, the state of the question in modern scholarship on the problem of freedom and necessity in early modern Reformed thought is itself multi-layered.

First, questions concerning the relationship of the thought of the Reformers to their orthodox-era successors on the issue of freedom and necessity retain some of the contours of the old “Calvin against the Calvinists” debate. Was the development continuous or discontinuous; which of the first- and second-generation Reformers (if any) supplied the proximate foundations for Protestant development? Did the rise of Protestant scholasticism with its broader access to the older tradition alter the complexion of Reformed doctrine? Was it a formal alteration brought about by the introduction of scholastic method or a substantive alteration in doctrinal content. And, if a matter of content, was this alteration toward a more deterministic or predestinarian model or away from it?

Second, granting the detailed and increasingly specific access particularly of seventeenth-century Reformed writers to the broader patristic and medieval tradition of theology and philosophy,⁴³ a set of questions arises concerning reception and appropriation. How did Reformed writers access older, often scholastic, patterns of argumentation given their fundamentally different stance over against the tradition from their Roman Catholic counterparts and given as well the varied backgrounds of the earlier Reformers in diverse religious orders, intellectual movements, and philosophical trajectories of the later Middle Ages and Renaissance? What were the theological and philosophical preferences of the various Reformed writers or of the Reformed confessional movement as a whole—was the tendency toward Thomism or Scotism, was it eclectic, and how much did the reception of these currents vary from one Reformed thinker to another? Further, when Thomist or Scotist patterns of definition and argument are found among the Reformed, from what sources did these definitions and arguments come—medieval or early modern or both?

43. Note the relevant essays in Irena Backus, ed., *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West: From the Carolingians to the Maurists*, 2 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997); also see Byung Soo Han, *Symphonia Catholica: The Merger of Patristic and Contemporary Sources in the Theological Method of Amandus Polanus von Polansdorf (1561–1610)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015); Carl R. Trueman, “Patristics and Reformed Orthodoxy: Some Brief Notes and Proposals,” in *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, 12/2 (2008), pp. 52–60; and note the classic studies of John Patrick Donnelly, *Calvinism and Scholasticism in Vermigli’s Doctrine of Man and Grace* (Leiden: Brill, 1975); and idem, “Calvinist Thomism,” in *Viator*, 7 (1976), pp. 441–455.

Third, with reference only to issues of freedom, necessity, and contingency (albeit recognizing the broader implications of the question), how should the Reformed appropriation of traditionary arguments be understood in relation to the perennial philosophical questions, particularly as represented in understandings of Aristotle and the Peripatetic tradition? To the extent that the question of Thomist or Scotist backgrounds to Reformed thought engages the issue of medieval understandings of Aristotle, how did medieval thinkers understand Aristotle on the problem of necessity and contingency; how does their reception and modification of Aristotle's arguments serve to interpret later receptions of medieval materials? And how, given this long history of reception and debate, did the Reformed writers of the early modern era interpret Aristotle, or, more precisely, how did they receive and interpret the peripatetic tradition?⁴⁴

Other questions of similar bearing on the topic could easily be generated. Given the number and complexity of these questions, some must remain peripheral to the main lines of inquiry in the present essay and others will need to be reviewed in a somewhat abbreviated form, with reference to bodies of secondary literature. The whole will, of course, be focused on the questions directly concerned with Reformed orthodox argumentation concerning freedom and necessity, taken in the general sense of the God-world relationship and the doctrine of divine concurrence in matters of natural causality and free choice—leaving aside the more specific theological issue of sin, grace, and free choice.

These formal considerations yield a study organized into three parts. The first part deals with the contemporary debates over the issue of Reformed orthodoxy and philosophy and over the concept of “synchronic contingency” and its impact on the older Reformed theology. The second is concerned with the questions of the reception of Aristotle and the medieval backgrounds, referencing as well current debate over the implications of particular texts on necessity and contingency in Aristotle, Aquinas, and Scotus. The third part examines the early modern Reformed formulations. This three part structure stands in direct relationship to the way in which issues can be addressed: the issue of diachronic and synchronic contingency (and whether the terms themselves are proper applications to the materials) runs through the entire length of the essay, given the backgrounds to the debate in the ancient understandings of necessity, possibility, contingency, and impossibility. Here the issue of non-theistic philosophical approaches to libertarianism and compatibilism can also be raised. The issue of compatibilism versus libertarianism, including the question of the applicability of these terms, arises in theistic form only in the discussion of the late patristic, medieval, and early modern Christian writers.

44. The tradition was highly adapted and variegated: note, e.g., Theodore Van Raalte, “Antoine de Chandieu (1534–1591): One of the Fathers of Reformed Scholasticism?” (PhD dissertation, Calvin Theological Seminary, 2013), on the use of Galenic hypothetical syllogisms in nominally “Peripatetic” logic.

Inasmuch as these historical theses entail a set of assumptions concerning not only Duns Scotus but also Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, the essay will also examine the arguments for and against determinist readings of Aristotle and Aquinas particularly as they impact the question of a revolutionary revision of the understanding of contingency in the thought of Duns Scotus. This examination will entail a fairly close look at Aristotle's argumentation, particularly in his *De Interpretatione* and *Metaphysica*, as well as at the ways in which these arguments were received in the Western philosophical tradition, notably, by Thomas Aquinas. Given an analysis of Aquinas' thought, both his relation to Scotus' development of language concerning contingency and to the issue of what Vos has called the "master problem" of the older Christian philosophical tradition can be brought into focus.⁴⁵ This analysis can then provide a background to what is actually the central historical question of the inquiry, namely, whether the understanding of contingency and freedom found in early modern Reformed orthodoxy arose by way of the reception of specifically Scotistic arguments or whether it ought to be understood as a more eclectic early modern reception of elements of the broader tradition of Christian Aristotelianism, including Thomist as well as Scotist elements.

The main thesis of the essay concerns the content and implications of early modern Reformed understandings of freedom and necessity in the larger context of an understanding of providence or, more precisely, the providential *concursus* or divine concurrence. The essay will argue that early modern Reformed theologians and philosophers developed a robust doctrine of creaturely contingency and human freedom built on a series of traditional scholastic distinctions, including those associated with what has come to be called "synchronic contingency," and did so for the sake of respecting the underlying premise of Reformed thought that God eternally and freely decrees the entire order of the universe, past, present, and future, including all events and acts, whether necessary, contingent, or free. In this context, it will be argued that, contrary to several of the recent approaches to this issue, synchronic contingency is not by itself an ontology but rather serves as an explanatory language, used in conjunction with a series of related scholastic distinctions, that is supportive of the ontological assumptions belonging to the Reformed doctrines concerning the relationship of God and world, notably, the doctrine of providence. In this context, moreover, there will also be a need to critique the somewhat anachronistic application of the modern language of compatibilism, incompatibilism, and libertarianism to the medieval and early modern materials,⁴⁶ just as there needs to be a more contextualized explanation of synchronic

45. Cf. Antonie Vos, "The Theoretical Centre and Structure of Scotus' *Lectura*: Philosophy in a New Key," in *Via Scoti: Methodologica ad mentem Joannis Duns Scoti*, ed. Leonardo Sileo, 2 vols. (Rome: Antonianum, 1995), I, pp. 455–473, here, pp. 456–459; idem, "Always on Time," p. 65.

46. By compatibilism, or what has been called "classical compatibilism," I understand a view of freedom and determinism that identifies freedom as "the power or ability to do what we want or desire to do" as paired with "an absence of constraints or impediments . . . preventing us from doing what we

contingency, given both the imprecision of the term and its absence from the scholastic sources.

Further, the essay will show that the seeming paradox of God decreeing all things including contingencies and free acts, when placed into its early modern context and its traditional scholastic usages, is not at all paradoxical but rests on a particular understanding of the concurrent operation of primary and secondary causality in the work of divine providence, defined by the terminology and distinctions associated with synchronic contingency. That understanding, moreover, with its paradigms for distinguishing and relating divine and creaturely causalities, identifies both the medieval and the early modern formulations as significantly different from the concerns of the modern compatibilist and libertarian approaches to the problem of human freedom. When, therefore, the older scholastic discussions of divine and creaturely causality and of various kinds of necessity and contingency are placed into this broader theological and philosophical context of providence and *concursum*, some of the problems raised concerning the attribution of the language of synchronic contingency to the scholastics generally and specifically to the early modern Reformed, notably the complaint that this attribution improperly reinterprets Reformed theology as a form of libertarianism, are set aside and the differences between the Reformed position and the views of modern compatibilists as well as libertarians become clear.

The essay will also argue that the concept of synchronic or simultaneous contingency presented in the work of Vos, Dekker, Bac and the other authors of *Reformed Thought on Freedom* and his associates should be understood in the context of several rather distinct issues and interpreted in terms of a series of further scholastic distinctions specifically as they are used to identify and argue ontological as well as logical conclusions. Failure to reference these distinctions consistently, indeed, the failure to focus on the entire series of different terms and the distinctions that they convey, can result in confusion and in the creation of unnecessary opposition to the central theological and philosophical points of the *Reformed Thought on Freedom* thesis on the nature of contingency as defined by the early modern Reformed. Vos sets out various of these distinctions most carefully in his monograph on *The Philosophy of John Duns Scotus*,⁴⁷ less clearly and fully in other

want" (Robert Kane, *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2005], p. 13). Libertarianism is incompatibilist by definition, assuming that genuine freedom is incompatible with any form of determinism (ibid., p. 32) and implies an ability of "self-formation" understood as "the power to do otherwise here and now" (ibid., pp. 172–173). Note the sensitivity to the problem of possible anachronism in the use of these terms in Katherin Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 2–8; and further note Freddoso's comments on the inapplicability of "libertarian" and "compatibilist" language in Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge: Part IV of the Concordia*, trans. with intro. and notes by Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 24–28, 42.

47. See Anton Vos, *The Philosophy of John Duns Scotus* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), pp. 221, 228–236.

works.⁴⁸ They also appear, in fully developed forms in Andreas Beck's work on Voetius.⁴⁹

Thus, the concept of synchronic contingency needs to be understood, then in the light of a reading of such distinctions as *simultas potentiae–potentia simultatis*, *necessitas consequentis–necessitas consequentiae*, *prima causa–causa secunda*, and *sensus compositus–sensus divisus*, namely, the simultaneity of potency versus the potency for simultaneity, the necessity of the consequent thing versus the necessity of the consequence, primary or ultimate causality versus secondary causality, and the composite sense versus the divided sense—not to mention a series of other distinctions regularly used by the scholastics concerning the divine knowledge, will, and acts *ad intra* and *ad extra*. Arguably, taken in a strict sense, only one of these issues may be suitably identified with synchronic or simultaneous contingency, namely, the simultaneity of potencies in a subject capable of bringing about different, even contrary effects. The other issues ought to be distinguished from synchronic contingency, strictly understood: absolute or physical necessity in distinction from logical necessity; simultaneous operation of more than one cause, particularly of efficiencies, in the bringing about of one effect; and the use of modal expressions (composite and divided) to present contraries without violating the law of non-contradiction, the principle of excluded middle, or the principle of bivalence.⁵⁰ This is not to deny that there are major differences to be observed among late medieval schools of thought concerning definitions of contingency or that the battery of arguments gathered under the rubric of synchronic contingency are significant to the discussion of contingency and freedom—hardly—rather the point is to require more

48. The distinctions are not as fully expressed in Anton Vos, “De kern van de klassieke Gereformeerde theologie,” in *Kerk en Theologie*, 47 (1996), pp. 114–120; idem, “Always on Time,” pp. 65–67; idem, “The Systematic Place of Reformed Scholasticism: Reflections Concerning the Reception of Calvin's Thought,” in *Church History and Religious Culture*, 91 (2011), pp. 35–39; and Van Asselt et al., “Introduction,” in *RTF*, pp. 41–43, B. J. D. van Vreeswijk, ““An Image of Its Maker: Theses on Freedom of Franciscus Junius (1545–1602),” in *RTF*, p. 125; E. Dekker and M. A. Schouten, “Undisputed Freedom: A Disputation of Franciscus Gomarus (1563–1641),” in *RTF*, p. 143; and E. Dekker, A. J. Beck, and T. T. J. Pleizier, “Beyond Indifference: An Elenctic Locus on Free Choice by Francesco Turretini,” in *RTF*, pp. 194–196, etc., where, arguably, much background is presumed.

49. Andreas Beck, *Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676): Sein Theologieverständnis und seine Gotteslehre* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), pp. 344–358, 403–425; also idem, “Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676): Basic Features of His Doctrine of God,” in *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise*, ed. Willem J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), pp. 205–226, hereinafter cited as “Basic Features.”

50. In what follows, I understand “law of non-contradiction” as synonymous with “law of contradiction” and use the former term, indicating that two contradictory propositions cannot both be true simultaneously, viz., at the same time, in the same place, and in the same way. “Excluded middle” is understood as a corollary of non-contradiction, namely, that there cannot be a middle or third possibility between two contradictory propositions and, accordingly, one must be true and the other false. As distinct from these two principles or laws, the “principle of bivalence” references a single proposition, indicating that the proposition must be either true or false.

precise definition of the synchronicity or, indeed, synchronicities, that must be identified in discussion of the larger issue of contingency and freedom in the world order.

The distinction between diachronic and synchronic contingency has to do with the temporal identification or indexing of the root of contingency. In the diachronic model, the contingent is something in the present that could have occurred otherwise given past alternative possibilities or potencies. The contingency is defined primarily in terms of an alternate state of affairs that was possible prior to the eventuation of present moment, and, typically, the event or act in the present moment is understood simply as something that does not exist always and is not necessary. In the synchronic model, the contingent is something present that presently could be otherwise given the unactualized but nonetheless remaining alternative possibility or potency. The contingency is identified “synchronically” as an alternate state of affairs that is possible (albeit not actual) in the present moment. According to this synchronic understanding, the language of “not always” and “not necessary” is replaced by a language of “could be otherwise” in the specific sense that, the potency for the opposite remaining present, the opposite of what occurred could occur in that particular moment. In short, the diachronic definition appears to root contingency in past possibility, defining the contingent as something that can either not exist or be false at a time other than when it exists or is true. The synchronic definition roots contingency in the existence of a present potency to the opposite, defining the contingent as something that, potentially, may either not exist or be false at the same time that it exists or is true. Synchronic contingency, however, is not to be understood as violating either the law of non-contradiction or the principle of bivalence: it does not constitute a claim that a particular actuality can actually be other than what it is in the present moment or that a proposition can be both true and false—although it can entail the assumption that contradictory propositions concerning future conditionals are presently indeterminate or indefinite.⁵¹

It needs be noted, without getting too far ahead of the historical evidence, that these views of contingency are not necessarily mutually exclusive—nor, indeed, do they necessarily pose different views either of the contingency of the thing caused or of the relationship of potencies to actualities.⁵² Those differences arise from other

51. See Harm Goris, *Free Creatures of an Eternal God: Thomas Aquinas on God's Infallible Foreknowledge and Irresistible Will*, Publications of the Thomas Instituut te Utrecht, New Series, 4 (Nijmegen: Stichting Thomasfonds, 1996), pp. 257–288; and also note the definitions in Knuuttila, *Modalities in Medieval Philosophy*, pp. 31–38; idem, “Modal Logic,” in *Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy: From the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism, 1100–1600*, ed. N. Kretzmann, A. Kenny, J. Pinborg, and E. Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 353; and Vos, *Philosophy of John Duns Scotus*, pp. 33–34, 225, 228–236.

52. Cf. Ian Wilks, “The Use of Synchronic Contingency in Early Fourteenth Century Debate over the World's Temporal Duration,” in *Disputatio: An International Transdisciplinary Journal of the Late Middle Ages*, 2 (1997), pp. 143–158; and note Wilks' definitions, p. 143.

elements of the argumentation, including assumptions concerning the nature of divine eternity, the nature of providential concurrence, and the nature of the necessity of the present—as consequent or of the consequence—and, more importantly, from the way in which possibilities and potencies are understood in the context of their opposites being actualized.

Accordingly, it is debatable whether the two views, as just now defined, invariably propose alternative notions of possibility.⁵³ They may, in some cases, simply be different ways of expressing the same contingency.⁵⁴ Nor, as we will see, does one definition lead to a determinist and the other to an indeterminist or libertarian understanding of the relationship of God to the world order or, more specifically, to human free choice. The compatibility of the two definitions and their relationship to determinism will become a significant issue in subsequent chapters, and it underlines a central question that can be raised concerning the historical aspect of the account of contingency presented by Vos and his associates.

In relation to these definitions, there is an undeniably “*diachronic* relation” of past, present, and future times that stands in distinction with (but is not necessarily separated from) “*synchronic* relation of cause to effect,” particularly with reference to the interrelationship of primary and secondary causality.⁵⁵ When the causal operation of a single temporal contingent is taken by itself, there is a necessary diachronicity of cause and effect, although, particularly in the case of free rational creatures that have potency to more than one effect, there is a simultaneity of potencies to will or not will or will otherwise. Further, when several temporal causes operate to produce an effect in the same moment, there is a causal synchronicity in the course of diachronic relations. When, moreover, the dual divine and human causality in the production of contingents is considered, there is a causal synchronicity. And when the contrary, unactualized potencies of the divine and human causes of the event are considered, from the perspective of the unactualized alternative possibility, there is a synchronic contingency represented by real possibles known both to God and to the human subject and a simultaneity of potencies both in God and in the human subject capable of actualizing alternative possibles. This causal synchronicity in bringing about contingencies understood as conjoined with the concept of simultaneous potencies has, moreover, been argued in several different ways, only one of which is specifically Scotist.

Of course, as already indicated, the terms “synchronic contingency” and “simultaneous contingency” are themselves of modern origin and not so clearly

53. Contra Vos, *Philosophy of John Duns Scotus*, p. 228, where he deals with the distinction between synchronic possibilities or potencies and synchronic contingency but also sees this pairing as fully opposed to the pairing of diachronic possibility and diachronic contingency.

54. Wilks, “Use of Synchronic Contingency,” pp. 143–144.

55. My usage here is derived from Goris, *Free Creatures of an Eternal God*, pp. 61–66, distinguishing between a *diachronic* “temporal fatalism” and a *synchronic* “causal determinism” but also working to establish their precise relation in discussions of God’s “fore-actions” and temporal events.

rooted in the sources—a point that does not cancel their usefulness, but that ought to make the user a bit wary of their loose application and of their potential to mislead. In the sources that we will examine, language of synchronicity or, more precisely simultaneity, arises in relation to the issue of a particular rational being having the capacity to will, not will, or will otherwise: the simultaneity in this case is not a simultaneity of contingencies but also a simultaneity of capacities or potencies. This latter language of simultaneity of potencies is clearly present in the terminology used in the scholastic sources. Once placed into its context in Reformed explanations of divine and human causality, the concept and language of or simultaneous potencies will be seen to provide nuanced explanations of contingent and free acts, particularly those that involve more than one free, rational, volitional being—without, however, departing from the basic assumptions associated with diachronic contingency.

One further question hovers around the edges of the research: the question of the applicability of the modern language of “compatibilism” and “libertarianism” to arguments set in pre-modern contexts. The question arises because of the use of this language in much of the scholarship and because of the obvious difficulty that the scholarship has encountered in characterizing traditional arguments, whether from the medieval or the early modern eras, as compatibilist or libertarian. Part of the problem of the terminology is that it is subject to various meanings and connotations—another part, however, is that the terms “compatibilist” and “libertarian,” however defined, given the differences between modern understandings of causality, necessity, and contingency, may not be suitable to describe or characterize many of the medieval and early modern arguments. Modern attempts to press the older scholastic theology into the categories identified by these terms can (and has) become quite problematic itself—most notably perhaps in the attempt to interpret the older Reformed theology or “Calvinism” in terms of a modern compatibilist model. This terminological problem, like the terminological problem of “synchronic contingency,” will appear at various points in the essay and, hopefully, will find some resolution, at least in terms of early modern Reformed applications, in the conclusion.

1.3 Synchronic Contingency: Historiographical Issues of Medieval and Early Modern Debate, Conversation, and Reception

A series of studies of the problem of necessity and contingency in late medieval and early modern Reformed thought have advanced our understanding of the ways in which traditional theologies and philosophies have accounted for the relationship of God to the world order and for the existence of human freedom in a radically contingent world order that owes its very existence to the divine will.⁵⁶ These studies

56. On this medieval and specifically Scotist background, see Knuuttila, *Modalities in Medieval Philosophy*, pp. 138–149; John Duns Scotus, *Contingency and Freedom, Lectura I 39: Introduction*,

have not only contributed significantly to an understanding of the medieval backgrounds of Protestant thought, they have also considerably enriched our understanding of the inherited technical language used by Protestant philosophers and theologians of the early modern era. The technical language of early modern Protestant theology and philosophy is now recognized to belong to a tradition of dialogue and debate formed by medieval scholastics like Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Thomas Bradwardine, Gregory of Rimini, and William of Ockham. In particular, a body of recent studies has argued a strongly Scotist cast to Reformed orthodox theology as it developed into the seventeenth century.⁵⁷

Nonetheless, the interpretation of Reformed scholastic understandings of necessity, contingency, and freedom along Scotist lines that is characteristic of these studies and their further claim that a specifically Scotist theme of synchronic contingency is the “identifying paradigm” and “conceptual” or “systematic centre” of Reformed orthodox theology has not gone unquestioned.⁵⁸ On the one hand, scholarship dealing with the concept of synchronic contingency in medieval thought is not entirely in agreement with Vos’ assessment and approach. Several writers have indicated sources and usages of the concept other than Scotus and Scotism. The

Translation and Commentary, ed. A. Vos et al. (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1994), hereinafter cited as “Scotus, *Lectura*”; Stephen D. Dumont, “The Origin of Duns Scotus’s Theory of Synchronic Contingency,” in *The Modern Schoolman*, 72/2–3 (1995), pp. 149–168; idem, “Did Scotus Change His Mind on the Will?” in *Nach der Verurteilung von 1277*, ed. J. Aertsen, K. Emery, and A. Speer (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2001); Wilks, “Use of Synchronic Contingency,” pp. 143–158; and, most recently, Vos, *Philosophy of John Duns Scotus*, pp. viii, 4, 11, 33, 39, 41, et passim, where “synchronic contingency” is argued to be the center of Scotus’ thought. Note that the issue of synchronic or simultaneous contingency was already noted in Scotus by Émile Pluzanski, *Essai sur la philosophie de Duns Scot* (Paris: Ernest Thorin, 1888), pp. 188–193; Reinhold Seeberg, *Die Theologie des Johannes Duns Scotus: Eine dogmengeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Leipzig: Dieterich’sche Verlag, 1900), p. 87; C. R. S. Harris, *Duns Scotus*, 2 vols. (New York: Humanities Press, 1959), II, pp. 213–222; and in Bradwardine by Reinhold Seeberg, “Bradwardine,” in *RE*, III, pp. 350–352; Heiko A. Oberman, *Archbishop Thomas Bradwardine: A Fourteenth-Century Augustinian. A Study of his Theology in its Historical Context* (Utrecht: Kemink en Zoon, 1957), pp. 76–94, 102–103, 107–114; and Gordon Leff, *Bradwardine and the Pelagians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), pp. 98–109, 113–115, 162–164, 185–188, 213–216, 238–241.

57. Antonie Vos, “Always on Time,” pp. 53–73; idem, “Scholasticism and Reformation,” in W. J. van Asselt and E. Dekker, eds., *Reformation and Scholasticism*, pp. 99–119; Beck, “Basic Features,” pp. 205–226; Antonie Vos and Andreas J. Beck, “Conceptual Patterns Related to Reformed Scholasticism,” in *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift*, 57/3 (2003), pp. 223–233; Beck, *Gisbertus Voetius*; Bac, *Perfect Will Theology*; Van Asselt et al., “Introduction,” in *RTF*, pp. 16–17, 22, 26, 39, 41; Andreas J. Beck, “The Will as Master of Its Own Act: A Disputation Rediscovered of Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676) on Freedom of Will,” in *RTF*, p. 156; Dekker, Beck, and Pleizier, “Beyond Indifference,” in *RTF*, p. 195; Roelf T. te Velde and Anton Vos, “Conclusion,” in *RTF*, pp. 234, 239; and Roelf T. te Velde, *Paths Beyond Tracing Out*, pp. 83, 113, 114 n78, 115, 152 n20, 185, 186, 214; Burton, *Hallowing of Logic*, pp. 11–15, 39–41, 66–67, 125–127, 157–161, 171–186, 275–277, 377–388, et passim.

58. See Vos, “Scholasticism and Reformation,” p. 111; and Bac, *Perfect Will Theology*, pp. 3, 169, 497–505.

significance of the concept and its formulae have also been debated, notably in relation to the issue of understandings of contingency and freedom prior to Scotus, whether in the Peripatetic tradition generally, in the medieval reception of Aristotle, or in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. On the other hand, in a very general sense, the identification of early modern Reformed understandings of the God-world relationship as predominantly Scotist is disputed by a line of scholarship that understands the Reformed orthodox writers as philosophically eclectic and grounded in a rather broad background of patristic and medieval materials.⁵⁹ The claim of an “identifying paradigm” or “conceptual center” that serves as the interpretive pivot for the whole of early modern Reformed theology and renders it Scotist appears to have problematic affinities to the older central dogma theory or to what Quentin Skinner identifies as a “mythology of coherence” imposed on materials of the past.⁶⁰ One recent study has shown, moreover, the strongly non-Scotist and even anti-Scotist direction of Reformed thought on the question of the univocity of being.⁶¹ In addition to the specific point of early modern Reformed thought on freedom and contingency, the applicability of Scotist language of synchronic contingency to early modern Reformed thought has been challenged, most notably by Paul Helm, who has argued that the language itself is confusing, indeed, impossible from an ontic perspective, and (as interpreted by Vos and others) at odds with the assumptions of the Reformed orthodox.⁶²

There are also several approaches to Reformed thought, both in the Reformation and in the era of orthodoxy, that have identified other medieval backgrounds. Beyond this, examination of the highly influential Reformation-era theology of Peter Martyr Vermigli, often viewed as one of the more significant forebears of Reformed orthodoxy, has identified roots both in Thomism and in the late medieval

59. See Muller, “Reformation, Orthodoxy, ‘Christian Aristotelianism’”; idem, “The ‘Reception of Calvin’ in Later Reformed Theology,” in *Church History and Religious Culture*, 91 (2011), pp. 258–260; and note idem, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), hereinafter cited as PRRD, I, pp. 41, 65, 67, 119, 344, 351, 367–382, 449–450; Carl Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 57.

60. Helm, “Synchronic Contingency in Reformed Scholasticism,” p. 222; and note Quentin Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,” in *History and Theory*, 8 (1969), pp. 3–53.

61. Richard A. Muller, “Not Scotist: Understandings of Being, Univocity, and Analogy in Early Modern Reformed Thought,” in *Reformation & Renaissance Review*, 14/2 (2012), pp. 125–148.

62. Helm, “Synchronic Contingency in Reformed Scholasticism,” pp. 207–222; and idem, “Synchronic Contingency Again,” in *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift*, 57/3 (2003), pp. 234–238, responding to Vos and Beck, “Conceptual Patterns”; and see the similar objection to Knuuttila’s and Dumont’s approach in Scott MacDonald, “Synchronic Contingency, Instants of Nature, and Libertarian Freedom: Comments on ‘The Background to Scotus’ Theory of Will,” in *The Modern Schoolman*, 72 (1995), pp. 169–174. Note also the reservations in Simo Knuuttila’s review of Vos’ *Philosophy of John Duns Scotus in Ars Disputandi*, 7 (2007).

Augustinianism of Gregory of Rimini.⁶³ Wolfgang Musculus regularly cited Aquinas, Scotus, and Occam.⁶⁴ The view of a predominantly Scotistic background to Reformed orthodoxy, therefore, cannot go unquestioned: the roots of Reformed orthodoxy in the work of major second-generation codifiers of the Reformation point toward an eclectic reception of medieval materials.

There is, moreover, an older line of scholarship, often complicated by the problematic dogmatism of the “Calvin against the Calvinists” theory, that had identified Reformed scholasticism as focused on speculations concerning the divine will, but that had tended to argue a Thomistic background to Reformed orthodox theology.⁶⁵ Although subsequent scholarship has set aside the “Calvin against the Calvinists” approach, the identification of Thomistic or modified Thomistic elements as well as a significant eclecticism in many of the older Protestant theologies remains characteristic of much of the scholarship, a point that stands against the more recent claims of a primarily Scotist background.⁶⁶

There have also been at least two significant shifts in Vos’ argumentation concerning the medieval backgrounds of Reformed Protestantism and the

63. The Thomistic background is identified in Donnelly, *Calvinism and Scholasticism in Vermigli’s Doctrine of Man and Grace*; as also in his “Calvinist Thomism”; on the impact of Gregory of Rimini, see Frank James III, *Peter Martyr Vermigli and Predestination: The Augustinian Inheritance of an Italian Reformer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); idem, “A Late Medieval Parallel in Reformation Thought: *Gemina praedestinatio* in Gregory of Rimini and Peter Martyr Vermigli,” in *Via Augustini* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), pp. 157–188; and idem, “*De iustificatione*: The Evolution of Peter Martyr Vermigli’s Doctrine of Justification” (PhD dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 2000).

64. See the careful analysis of Musculus’ Franciscan, but not necessarily Scotist, tendencies in Jordan Ballor, *Covenant, Casuality, and Law: A Study in the Theology of Wolfgang Musculus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), pp. 113–114, 118–120, 223–228; and see the tabulation of medieval sources cited by Musculus in Robert B. Ives, “The Theology of Wolfgang Musculus (1497–1562)” (PhD dissertation, University of Manchester, 1965), pp. 115–127.

65. Thus, Gründler, “Thomism and Calvinism in the Theology of Girolamo Zanchi,” pp. 23, 122, 125, 128–129, 150–151, 155–157, etc.; also, idem “The Influence of Thomas Aquinas upon the Theology of Girolamo Zanchi,” in *Studies in Medieval Culture*, ed. J. R. Sommerfeldt (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University Press, 1964), pp. 102–117; and Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, pp. 39–40, 130, 139 (explicitly following Gründler).

66. See Donnelly, “Calvinist Thomism,” pp. 441–455; and idem, “Italian Influences on the Development of Calvinist Scholasticism,” in *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 7/1 (1976), pp. 81–101; Sebastian Rehnman, *Divine Discourse: The Theological Methodology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), pp. 25–45; Stephen Hampton, *Anti-Arminians: The Anglican Reformed Tradition from Charles II to George I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 221–265; Sytsma, “Harvest of Thomist Anthropology”; idem, *Richard Baxter and the Mechanical Philosophers*; James E. Bruce, *Rights in the Law: The Importance of God’s Free Choices in the Thought of Francis Turretin* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), pp. 33–40; Christopher Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013); also note Richard A. Muller, “Arminius and the Scholastic Tradition,” in *Calvin Theological Journal*, 24/2 (1989), pp. 263–277; idem, *God, Creation and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius: Sources and Directions of Scholastic Protestantism in the Era of Early Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991); and idem, PRRD, I, pp. 328–330, 334–336, 344–345, 387; III, p. 193, 213, 240, 293, 295–298, etc.

relationship between Calvin's theology and that of the Reformed orthodox. At a very early stage of his thought, Vos had indicated a strongly "Thomistic structuring" of Reformed orthodoxy, beginning with Vermigli, Zanchi, and Beza and extending into the metaphysical understanding of seventeenth-century Reformed philosophers—and understood this as a positive theological development.⁶⁷ Subsequently, he has argued a major shift away from Thomism at the close of the sixteenth century and that later Reformed orthodoxy was fundamentally Scotist, having set aside an earlier deterministic Thomism.⁶⁸ This shift in Vos' approach to the older Reformed theology relates directly to his perception of a major difference over contingency between Aquinas and Scotus; and it also involves a significant shift in his approach to Calvin. In the first major presentation of the thesis of Reformed views on freedom and contingency, Vos appears to have identified Calvin as teaching a basic, unnuanced approach to contingency and freedom, complicated by an emphasis on the specific issue of sin, grace, and free choice.⁶⁹ In a subsequent iteration of the thesis, however, Vos has retracted the point and identified Calvin as a Thomistic determinist over against the later Scotist models adopted by his successors in the seventeenth century.⁷⁰ Thus, the argument of some scholarship that Calvin's theology actually did evidence Scotist assumptions ironically serves to counter, not to support, Vos' thesis, inasmuch as the final form of his thesis depends on the juxtaposition of a non-Scotist Calvin with the later renaissance of Scotistic thought among later Reformed theologians—potentially creating an unintended parallel between his argumentation and that of the "Calvin against the Calvinists" school of thought.⁷¹

What has been lacking in the discussions of synchronic contingency, moreover, has been a full examination of the way in which the logically formulated language of synchronic contingency can be connected with a particular metaphysics of divine and human causality and then transferred into a consideration of contingencies and necessities in the real order of things. Specifically, the studies by Vos, Beck, and Bac have tended to argue the issue of synchronic contingency in formulae using modal logic, without pressing the more concrete questions of the application of these logical formulae to the real order—even in the case of their response to Helm's critique. Vos' assumption that the logical language of synchronic contingency and its

67. Anton Vos, "Thomas van Aquino en de gereformeerde theologie: Een theologiehistorische impressie," in *Jaarboek 1982: Werkgroep Thomas van Aquino*, Utrecht (1982), pp. 114–119, in particular p. 118 n6.

68. Vos, "Systematic Place of Reformed Scholasticism," pp. 34–41.

69. Roelf te Velde, "Always Free, but Not Always Good," p. 93; Van Vreeswijk, "Image of Its Maker," p. 125; Te Velde and Vos, "Conclusion," pp. 235–238.

70. Thus Vos, "Systematic Place of Reformed Scholasticism," pp. 31–34.

71. Calvin's Scotistic background is argued in Karl Reuter, *Das Grundverständnis der Theologie Calvins* (Neukirchen: Neukirchner Verlag, 1963); and idem, *Vom Scholaren bis zum jungen Reformator* (Neukirchen: Neukirchner Verlag, 1981); cf. François Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, trans. Philip Mairet (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 227–232.

attendant distinctions in itself implies a particular ontology is, arguably, quite mistaken, given the nature of scholastic method and the character of its distinctions.

Whereas the formulaic discussions characteristic of the work of Vos and his associates have the advantage of offering a clear logical vision of the issues under discussion, they also have the disadvantage of operating somewhat reductionistically, by removing the discussion from broader contexts to which the early modern language of necessity and contingency belong, namely, contexts of providence, causality, and the divine *concursum* that stood behind and provided a context for the language of the scholastics who raised and disputed the issues of necessity and contingency. This removal of the discussion to the realm of logic, although perhaps suitable in the twentieth or twenty-first century, where epistemology functions independently from ontology, may lose contact with the implications of late medieval and early modern theological and philosophical arguments that presumed the correlation of *ens rationale* with *ens reale*, namely, of the logical and the real orders.⁷² What is more, the way in which the Reformed actually developed this connection between the possible and the actual in relation to a particular construal of providential concurrence sheds light on the issue of the hypothesized Scotism of the Reformed orthodox.

The following essay will endeavor to examine and assess the issues raised in the scholarly debate over synchronic contingency in Reformed thought, particularly as it relates to the historiographical reassessment of Reformed orthodoxy. First, concentrating on understandings of necessity and contingency in scholastic theology, the essay will explore the questions of whether Aristotelian and Thomistic approaches to contingency lapse into a form of determinism and whether Scotus' arguments actually offer a radically new mode of understanding contingency. By resolving these questions, the essay will provide a broader, richer tradition of thought on human freedom than that posed by Vos. In this context, trajectories of thought and the nature of late medieval scholastic debate will be noted with a view to clarifying the question of whether an argument originating in Thomist or Scotist contexts and subsequently absorbed into a diversity of late medieval *viae* and eventually into early modern Reformed thought ought to be understood as consistently indicative of Thomism or Scotism or better viewed as eclectic.⁷³ Second,

72. Note that this purely logical approach is also characteristic of modern appropriations of the Molinistic language of *scientia media*, the tendency of which is to lapse into possible world theory and to leave aside the issues of ontology and providential *concursum* imbedded in Molina's work and in seventeenth-century debate. This issue is rightly identified *à propos* Scotus in Vos, *Philosophy of Duns Scotus*, p. 296, but not clearly built into his approach either to synchronic contingency in general or to the early modern Reformed. The problem is also evident in Knuutila, *Modalities in Medieval Philosophy*; and idem, "Medieval Commentators on Future Contingents in *De Interpretatione* 9," in *Vivianum*, 48 (2010), pp. 75–95.

73. Note the complexity of these patterns of argumentation as documented in, e.g., Oberman, *Archbishop Thomas Bradwardine*; M. J. F. M. Hoenen, *Marsilius of Inghen: Divine Knowledge in Late Medieval Thought* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993); Hester Goodenough Gelber, *It Could Have Been*

the essay will address the issues of whether early modern Reformed orthodox thought on contingency and freedom was framed by this language of synchronic contingency; whether this language contributes a significantly new dimension to arguments concerning necessity and contingency; and whether the use of such language in early modern Reformed circles should lead to an identification of the older Reformed tradition as distinctly “Scotistic.” Examination of this second set of questions will demonstrate the importance of synchronic or simultaneous contingency to early modern approaches to contingency and human freedom in the context of an eclectic reception of the materials of the scholastic tradition. Third and, admittedly, almost tangentially, the essay will return to the issue of the modern terminology of determinism, compatibilism, and libertarianism to indicate that, among other things, the early modern Reformed (not to mention the medieval) discussions of necessity and contingency contain significant elements that cannot easily be absorbed by the modern terminology.

Otherwise: Contingency and Necessity in Dominican Theology at Oxford, 1300–1350 (Leiden: Brill, 2004).