

• Free Will, Moral  
Responsibility, and  
Reformed Theology

• A Contemporary Introduction

*by Paul Manata*

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## 1. Introduction

The consequences Reformed theology has for God's goodness, man's free will and his moral responsibility are said to be the Achilles' heel of Reformed theology. According to many Christians, Reformed theology is the *bête noire* of the Christian tradition. This unfavorable assessment is due to the Reformed teaching on God's decree, providence, and omniscience as popularly summarized in Reformed creeds and confessions and expounded by Reformed theologians. This teaching is said to entail some unsavory results, primarily: (1) it turns men into mere puppets who lack free will, responsibility and culpability for their sins; and (2), this turns God into a moral monster and makes him the author of sin. This paper will look at the issue of man's free will and moral responsibility in light of Reformed teaching on God's decree, providence, and omniscience (I will refer to these Reformed Teachings as *RT*). Before I address the topic of the paper, we will look at some common reactions non-Reformed have to these teachings.

### 1.1 Complaints and criticisms

As a first approximation, *RT* states that anything that comes to pass does so only if God has decreed it; and, if God has decreed it then it must come to pass. That God governs and works all things toward their appointed ends. Lastly, that God knows all that could, would, or will come to pass simply by consulting his own nature, will, or decree. In light of these teachings and what they seem to imply about sin and men's salvation, Christian philosopher Victor Reppert once quipped, "The closest I ever came to atheism was when I first encountered the biblical case for Calvinism."<sup>1</sup> Arminian theologian Roger Olson tells us "The God

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<sup>1</sup> See <<http://dangerousidea.blogspot.com/2009/09/from-calvinism-to-atheism.html>>, last accessed 7/1/11.

of Calvinism scares me; I'm not sure how to distinguish him from the devil.”<sup>2</sup> Respected theologians and philosophers David Baggett and Jerry Walls claim *RT* suggests that God is worse than a hideous earthy dictator who “tortures babies,” and they also fly “violently in the face of some of our clearest and deepest moral intuitions.”<sup>3</sup> The highly regarded William Lane Craig remarks that “on this view God is not only the cause of sin and evil, but becomes evil Himself, which is absurd. By the same token, all human responsibility for sin has been removed.”<sup>4</sup> These remarks are not solely the complaints of contemporary Christians. Going back to John Wesley we see similar concerns, for example, in his sermon titled “Free Grace,” Wesley remarks that the above Reformed doctrines “represent the high God . . . as more cruel, false, and unjust than the devil!”<sup>5</sup> Going back further to the Jesuit theologian Luis de Molina, the above doctrines purportedly show that “God’s justice with respect to the wicked vanishes, and a manifest cruelty and wickedness is discerned in God.”<sup>6</sup> It is clear from this representative sample that many find these Reformed teachings intolerable.

I will make a few remarks about the above quotes. First, the term ‘Calvinism’ is used a lot. Outside the Reformed tradition ‘Calvinism’ and ‘Reformed theology’ are often co-referring in that they both refer to the Reformed Teachings mentioned above, i.e., *RT*. I will explain below how I am using the term ‘Reformed theology.’ Second, the above quotes should not be brushed off as

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<sup>2</sup> See <<http://www.baylor.edu/lariat/news.php?action=story&story=464866>>, last accessed 7/1/11.

<sup>3</sup> David Baggett and Jerry Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (Oxford University Press, 2011,) pp. 74, 78.

<sup>4</sup> William Lane Craig, “Response to Paul Kjoss Helseth,” in *Four Views on Divine Providence*, eds. Stanley N. Gundry and Dennis Jowers (Zondervan, 2011), p. 61.

<sup>5</sup> See <<http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-128-free-grace/>>, last accessed 7/1/11.

<sup>6</sup> Luis De Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge: Part IV of the Concordia*, trans. Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), vii. p. 139.

emotive rants. I cite them to illustrate the strong reactions many have to these Reformed doctrines, but it should not be thought that these reactions are given without argument. The above thinkers have given strong arguments to justify their strong reactions. Lastly, this paper will not be a response to the above charges. So what am I doing?

## 1.2 Confusions and clarification

### 1.2.1 Confusions

Given the above, one would think Reformed Christians well prepared to answer these kinds of challenges. One would be mistaken. Apart from needing better responses to the allegations about God's character, there does seem to be some genuine confusion about the nature of *RT*, and the implications it has for man's freedom and moral responsibility. One often finds misunderstandings disseminated by laymen on the Internet. This should not be surprising, for a cursory look at what Reformed teachers have said on the subject gives evidence of at least a surface tension among Reformed thinkers. I will present quotes that show various Reformed thinkers apparently at odds with each other. Perhaps if they sat down together and discussed things they would find themselves in agreement, perhaps not. The point here, though, is that there is at least *prima facie* conflict and no obvious unified message.

Burk Parsons, editor of *Tabletalk* magazine, writes that he "was humbled and amazed to find that Reformed theology is not a theology of determinism."<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, Tom Nettles of Southern Baptist seminary writes of the Reformed position, "This is a causal determinism perfectly harmonious, in the

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<sup>7</sup> See <<http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/why-not/>>, last accessed 7/1/11.

biblical revelation, with free moral activity of moral agents.”<sup>8</sup> The publisher’s description of the new book on freedom in Reformed thought claims, “The contributors demonstrate that traditional Calvinism cannot be easily dismissed as a form of philosophical determinism.”<sup>9</sup> Working with the Westminster Confession’s statements on *RT*, John Feinberg says that his “model incorporates compatibilistic free will.” This view “claims that even though actions are causally determined, they are still free . . .”<sup>10</sup> In contrast, Richard Muller writes that “the older Reformed theology was hardly built on metaphysics and in no way can be classed as a form of determinism.”<sup>11</sup> But in classifying different kinds of determinists John Frame writes, “Of special interest to us are (4) theological determinists, who hold that all events occur exactly as God has foreordained them. These would include Calvin and others in his tradition . . . That seems to be the position of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.”<sup>12</sup> So is *RT* deterministic or not?

Talk about human ability in light of the Reformed teachings is subject to similar apparently conflicting claims. John Feinberg states that the “fundamental tenet of determinism (and the various forms of Calvinism are forms of determinism) is that for everything that happens, in the light of prevailing conditions, the agent

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<sup>8</sup> See < <http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/journal/fj81/article1.html>>, last accessed 7/1/11.

<sup>9</sup> *Reformed Thought on Freedom: The Concept of Free Choice in Early Modern Reformed Theology*, ed. Willem J. van Asselt (Baker Academic, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> John Feinberg, *No One Like Him* (Crossway, 2001), p. 651.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Muller, “Was Calvin a Calvinist?”, October 15, 2009 Meter Lecture, available online here: <<http://www.calvin.edu/meeter/lectures/Richard%20Muller%20-%20Was%20Calvin%20a%20Calvinist.pdf>>, last accessed 7/2/11. I should add, though, that presupposing a metaphysic and consciously building on one are distinct concepts.

<sup>12</sup> John Frame, “Determinism, Chance, and Freedom,” for *IVP Dictionary of Apologetics*, available online: <[http://www.frame-poythress.org/frame\\_articles/2005Determinism.htm](http://www.frame-poythress.org/frame_articles/2005Determinism.htm)>, last accessed 7/2/11.

could not have done other than he did.”<sup>13</sup> Yet Stephen Charnock claims “Man hath a power to do otherwise than that which God foreknows he will do.”<sup>14</sup> In the context of God’s foreordaining Joseph’s brothers to sell him into slavery Gordon Clark says that this means “the brothers could not have done otherwise.”<sup>15</sup> In contrast, Richard Muller writes that Reformed theologians “viewed rational creatures capable of acting freely according to their natures, having both freedom of contradiction and freedom of contrariety.”<sup>16</sup> Though D. A. Carson says, “If compatibilism is true—and I cannot see how the biblical evidence supporting it could be evaded—then . . . human freedom cannot involve absolute power to the contrary.”<sup>17</sup> So does *RT* allow that we can do otherwise or not? While I could go on in citing ostensibly conflicting claims regarding the nature of *RT* and the implications it has for human abilities, I trust this sample is sufficient for our purposes.

### 1.2.2 Clarification

I am not claiming that all of the above quotes *actually* conflict or contradict each other, though I think some of them do, but that they at least appear to. Given the above quotes, is it any wonder why many Reformed laymen are confused? It thus

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<sup>13</sup> John Feinberg, “God, Freedom, and Evil in Calvinistic Thinking,” in *The Grace of God and the Bondage of the Will (Vol. 2): Historical and Theological Perspectives on Calvinism* (Baker, 1995), p. 463-64.

<sup>14</sup> Stephen Charnock, “God’s Foreknowledge and Free Will” from *The Existence and Attributes of God*, vol. 1, pp. 439-451, available online: <<http://www.mbrem123.com/calvinism/foreknowcharnock.php>>, last accessed 7/2/11.

<sup>15</sup> Gordon Clark, “Omniscience,” available online: <[http://www.the-highway.com/omniscience\\_Clark.html](http://www.the-highway.com/omniscience_Clark.html)>, last accessed 7/2/11.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Muller, Was Calvin a Calvinist?, October 15, 2009 Meter Lecture, available online here: <<http://www.calvin.edu/meeter/lectures/Richard%20Muller%20-%20Was%20Calvin%20a%20Calvinist.pdf>>, last accessed 7/2/11.

<sup>17</sup> D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord: Reflections on Suffering and Evil* (Baker Academic, 2006), p. 190.



seems to me that an introduction to free will and moral responsibility from a Reformed perspective and to a Reformed audience would be helpful.<sup>18</sup> Such an introduction for the Reformed community is the aim of this paper. This is an introduction to what the *Oxford Handbook of Free Will* says is “perhaps the most voluminously debated of all philosophical problems.”<sup>19</sup> I will claim that Reformed theology is a kind of determinism and requires freedom and moral responsibility to be compatible with this fact. I will not attempt to justify these claims, that is, I will only argue that *RT* is committed to determinism and compatibilism, not that (some kind of) determinism and compatibilism are true. I will assume as data the Reformed confessional and expository statements I cite, and then attempt to explore the implications this has for human freedom and moral responsibility.

About the project of clarification, Scott MacDonald writes,

Now, it seems clear that in pursuing this general project, the philosopher I’ve just described is not primarily concerned with the epistemic justification of [a particular claim]. She is concerned instead with understanding, developing, systematizing, and explaining it. It is possible for her to do all these things without raising the issue of its truth or her justification for holding it. The fact is that a very large part of philosophy has nothing directly to do with the truth or justification of certain theories or propositions. . . . Hence, clarification of theological matters is a legitimate task for the philosopher. Philosophers have not only a justificatory but also a clarificatory role to play in theology.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> But see Cowan and Spiegel’s, *The Love of Wisdom: A Christian Introduction to Philosophy* (B&H Academic, 2009), cf. section 5.3.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Kane, “Introduction,” *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, ed. Robert Kane (Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> Scott MacDonald, “What is Philosophical Theology?,” in *Arguing About Religion*, ed. Kevin Timpe (Routledge, 2009), p. 24.

Thus, one major aim of this introduction to Reformed thought on freedom is to clarify the issues with the hope that the reader will better be able to sort out the kinds of confusions seen in section 1.2.1. Another aim of this paper is that the reader will have a better understanding of the issues and concepts involved in the topic of free will and moral responsibility.

To accomplish this I will first give a broad overview of the issues, concepts, and worries that arise from philosophical reflection on free will and moral responsibility, specifically as they might relate to *RT*. I will bold important terms that appear in the literature. Next, I will lay out where Reformed theology is located in the overview. The position will be that Reformed theology presupposes a kind of determinism and requires a view of freedom and moral responsibility that is compatible with that. I will then look at various models of compatibilism that have either been historically popular with Reformed theologians, or which could be profitably employed in the service of theology. Next, I will discuss the most popular view of freedom in Christianity today, what is known as libertarian freedom. I will then present some of the ways people have argued against this view. Since my position in this paper is that Reformed theology is a type of determinism, I will next interact with a dissenting voice within Reformed theology that denies this. Since this position directly contradicts my thesis, I will not simply seek to clarify the issues but will argue against this view.

## **2. Free Will and Moral Responsibility: An Introduction**

### 2.1 An ordinary case

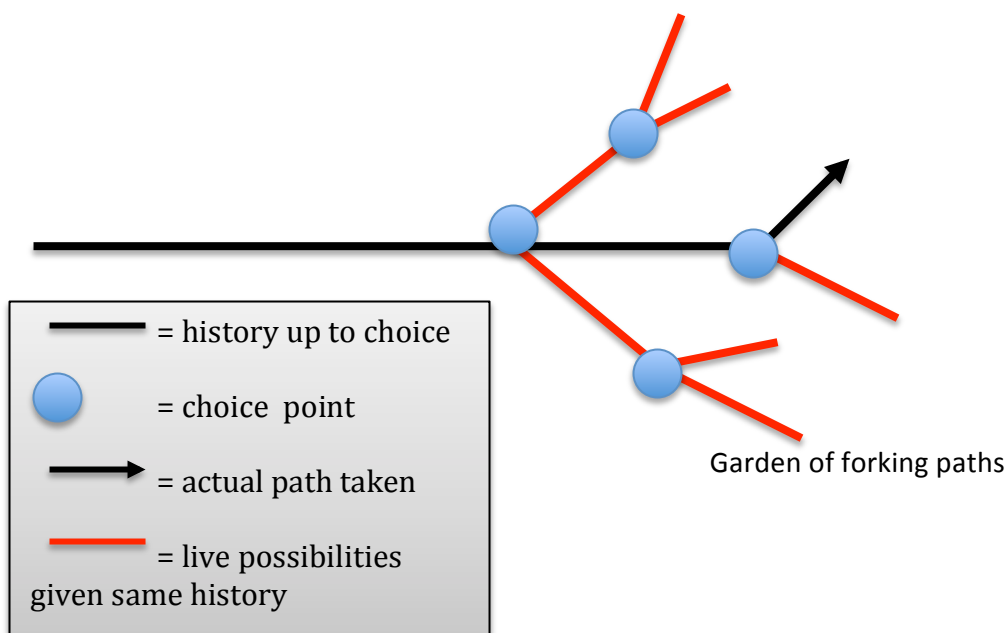
We can begin our introduction by considering an individual regarded to have free will and moral responsibility. Let's call this individual Frieda Wilma Morales, or

simply Frieda for short. Frieda is an ordinary Reformed Christian, not unlike many reading this. Frieda does many things, like contemplating feeding her neighbor's goldfish. Suppose Frieda's neighbor went on vacation and had asked Frieda if she would feed his goldfish daily while he is gone. She promised should would, and he gave her the house key and showed her where the food was located. If Frieda has **free will** we might say this means she has a kind of power or ability to act in the kinds of ways for which she can be held morally responsible. But what is it for Mrs. Morales to be morally responsible? We might say that **moral responsibility** is a status connected to people's actions, behavior, practices, etc., that makes them appropriate candidates of moral praise or blame, for moral approval or disapproval. In an ordinary case, whether or not Frieda feeds the goldfish, it seems that her doing (or not doing) so is a free action on her part. If she freely refrains, perhaps because she wants to watch *Felicity* reruns all day, we would disapprove of her actions since she had promised to feed the fish, and one ought to, all else being equal, keep one's promises. Our everyday intuitions are that Frieda made a free choice to laze around on the couch, and she is morally responsible for this choice. Since this was an arbitrarily chosen example about a fairly mundane activity, we can generalize from this to most of our choices and actions.

## 2.2 Forking paths and doing otherwise

When we reflect on Frieda's choice and action there are some other popular notions that come to mind. Until Frieda made the choice to stay inside all day glued to her television, we might think that her future was not settled. We might say that there are several possible alternatives available to her and that she can take any one of them. The idea is that our future can be pictured as branching out in several possible directions and taking any one of them is a live possibility

for us, and it is up to us which alternative we take. On this intuitive view, Frieda has control over which course she will take, the ability to select any of the alternatives. We thus might think that there is a **principle of alternative possibilities** at work here. This principle states that Frieda's freedom is grounded at least partly in the fact that she has different possible courses of action available to her. A picturesque metaphor is that of Borges's "garden of forking paths."



The picture above nicely illustrates the principle. It is important to note a few things about this picture. The straight line leading to the branches represents Frieda's past, the branches represent possible alternative courses of action Frieda could bring about. Notice that several possible futures branch off from a *single* past. In other words, this means that given the same past different futures are possible. Philosophers sometimes like to express this idea in terms of possible worlds. That is, they ask us to consider two worlds,  $W_1$  and  $W_2$ . Both of these

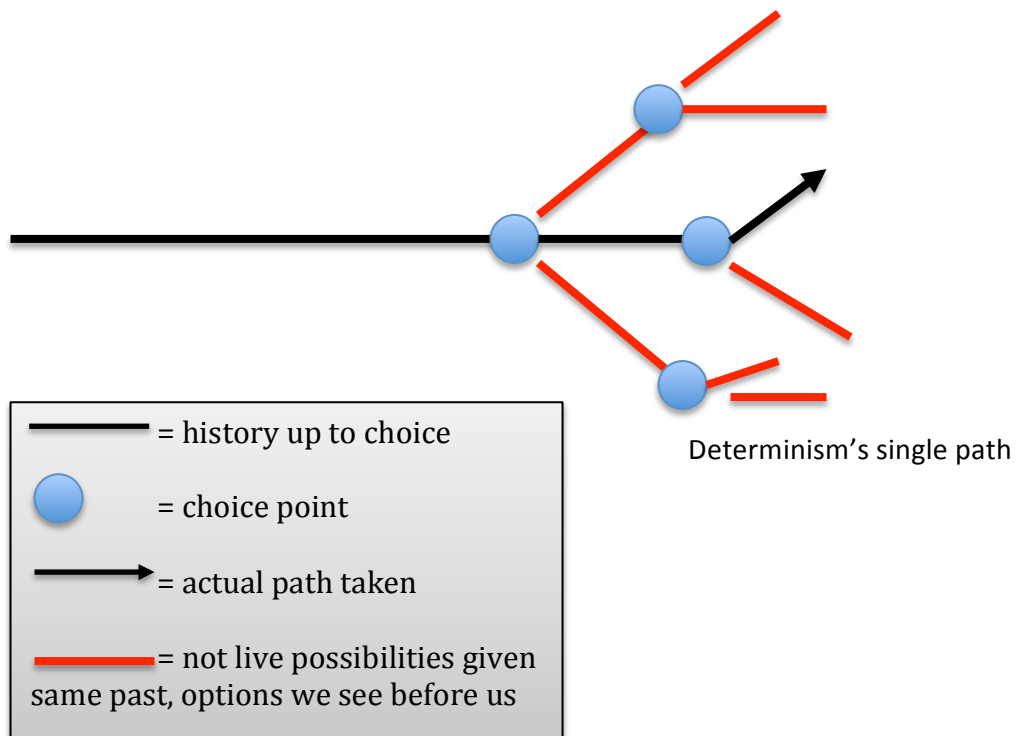
worlds are *identical* up until the moment Frieda chooses to either feed the fish or watch Felicity (or go to the beach, or . . .). The above view of freedom says that in order for her choice or action to be *free*, in  $W_1$  Frieda chooses to watch *Felicity* and in  $W_2$  Frieda chooses to feed the fish. This means that the circumstances of the past don't determine what Frieda will choose or do. That is: same past, different futures.

This conception also features prominently in our understanding of moral responsibility. We may naturally think that when we blame someone—like Frieda, for not keeping her promise—we are assuming that she could have acted otherwise. For example, we would not blame Frieda for not feeding the fish if she had slipped in the bathtub and blacked out until the next morning. Thus **ability to do otherwise** seems to many to be a principle that underwrites our ascribing praise or blame to ordinary people. We sometimes think that **'ought' implies 'can.'** That is, if Frieda ought to feed the fish, then she can do so. The above principles and maxims represent common understandings of what must be true for people to be free and morally responsible.

### 2.3 The threat of determinism

Yet in all this a worry might arise. One might think that science has shown that we live in a deterministic world. Perhaps the laws of nature together with past history entail a single possible future. Or, one might not think that physics shows that we live in a determined world but the evidence from biological, psychological, sociological, environmental, and economic factors does show this. Some might think laws of logic determine everything that happens. Some may think that “the fates” determine all things. And some may wonder if God's will or decree determines all that happens. It might even be thought that while the jury is out on these matters, some form of determinism *might* be true. If some form

of determinism is true, what might this mean for what we've discussed so far? To consider whether determinism is a threat to free will and moral responsibility we need to know what **determinism** is. Some event or action is determined when there are prior conditions (e.g., like those mentioned above) that obtain and which are sufficient for the event or action occurring. That is, it must be the case that *if* these prior conditions occur, then the event or action in question *must* occur. We might get a better understanding by contrasting the above garden of forking paths picture with the picture determinism gives us.



According to this view, then, the past continues in a single, unbroken line. The branches represent the various possible courses of action that we encounter and

deliberate about when making a choice,<sup>21</sup> but the breaks show that they are not “live” options. We can also consider this view according to our possible worlds approach we took above. Consider two possible determined worlds,  $W_{d1}$  and  $W_{d2}$ . If these deterministic worlds have *identical* pasts (or prior determining conditions) up to the moment Frieda makes her choice, then if Frieda in  $W_{d1}$  chooses to stay home and break her promise, then Frieda in  $W_{d2}$  must choose to stay home and break her promise too. Put differently, *given* the determining conditions, Frieda is never able to do otherwise. Thus, it is not *ultimately* “up to” Frieda what she does. If Frieda is blameworthy, then we must say that we disapprove of her action even though she could not have done otherwise given the same past.

It is clear that this view conflicts with what we said were perhaps ordinary, common sense intuitions regarding what we think it means to be free and morally responsible.<sup>22</sup> Given determinism, Frieda does not have any kind of ultimate control over her actions. She cannot select left or right in a way such that she is the **ultimate source** of her actions. This means that her choices and actions do not “originate” in her, in the sense that she is the ultimate source or first cause of her actions. For example, suppose Frieda had fallen asleep before

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<sup>21</sup> The notion of a ‘choice’ on determinism shouldn’t be seen as problematic, for even staunch libertarians have defined ‘choice’ in ways fully compatible with determinism, i.e., consider Robert Kane’s definition: “A choice is the formation of an intention or purpose to do something. It resolves uncertainty and indecision in the mind about what to do” (Kane, *Four Views on Free Will* (Blackwell, 2008), p. 33).

<sup>22</sup> However, this assessment is by no means obvious, for a fascinating counterbalance, see Eddy Nahmias et. al. “Surveying Freedom: Folk Intuitions about Free Will and Moral Responsibility” in *Philosophical Psychology* Vol. 18, No. 5, October 2005, pp. 561–584. In this study, the researchers surveyed ordinary “people’s prephilosophical judgments about the freedom and responsibility of agents in deterministic scenarios. In two studies, we found that a majority of participants judged that such agents act of their own free will and are morally responsible for their actions.” p. 561.

making her decision to stay home for the day. Suppose further that a hypnotist “planted a seed” in Frieda’s mind to make her want to stay home and break her promise. Upon waking she decides to stay home. In this case the decision did not “originate” in her. To be sure, determinism does not entail we are all hypnotized to do what we do, but it does seem to entail that our choices and actions do not originate in us in any ultimate sense. Determined agents are sources of their actions, even important sources, but they are not *ultimate* sources. Rather, past history and the laws of nature—conditions which obtain prior to and independently of determined agents—are the ultimate sources of their actions.

## 2.4 *RT* and the threat of determinism

The foregoing problems become more acute when we wonder whether *RT* might issue in a threat of determinism. For now, suppose it does. That is, suppose that God’s decree is necessary and sufficient for anything that happens to happen. Suppose that given God’s decree, identical results will obtain in all possible worlds that have identical decrees. This entails that no one can do other than God decrees. Suppose further that the ultimate source of all that happens is God’s decree grounded in his will. For Frieda, this means that she could not do otherwise than break the promise, and her desire to break the promise did not ultimately originate in her. Yet, Reformed Christians (and God!) would still want to say that she freely refrained from feeding the fish and that she is morally culpable for breaking her promise. Generalizing from this arbitrary case to more problematic cases the above means that if some people end up in hell they could not have done otherwise and they are not the ultimate sources or originators of their actions. The same applies with minor changes to all the evil in the world, yet Reformed believers would want to say that God is not the author of sin and that the sinner is morally culpable for his or her actions.



In light of the above, we can see why some would not want to call Reformed theology deterministic. We can also see why some have strongly reacted to teachings that appear to entail deterministic consequences. With the desire to get God off the hook for evil, and to lay proper blame at the feet of man, some Reformed theologians have affirmed deterministic sounding doctrines and yet denied that Reformed theology is deterministic. At times it seems it is thought that if we simply refuse to *call* Reformed theology a kind of “determinism,” then it is *not* a kind of determinism. Or, we sometimes hear that while *RT* seems deterministic, man has a freedom incompatible with determinism and these two truths are held together in tension, resulting in an “antinomy.” Put differently, some might claim both that given God’s decree no one can do otherwise and given God’s decree we still can do otherwise. In light of the above, we can understand the motive to distance Reformed theology from determinism, but in our attempts to do so we often claim a position that sounds at odds with *RT* and cause those outside the Reformed tradition to write us off as simply confused people who want to have their cake and eat it too.

It is the position of this paper that Reformed theology is a kind of determinism and thus will require a kind of freedom and moral responsibility compatible with this. As the paper progresses I will introduce more philosophical terms that are employed in this topic, and I will bold them as I have in this section. I hope this will clarify matters in the minds of many Reformed Christians, and it will be clear that a lot of room is left for debate within the Reformed tradition on how best to understand these matters. This allows freedom of conscience to develop models of the kind of determinism and compatibilism at work here. This freedom is required because the Bible does not present us with the specifics of either, and so presenting models is largely the job of philosophical theology. At this point in

the paper I hope the reader has a general feel for some of the issues involved in the topic of free will and moral responsibility. As the paper progresses some of the points brought up in this section will be refined, elaborated upon, or will be seen to lead into other issues.

### **3. Where Reformed Theology Stands: A Primer**

#### **3.1 How we got here: a broad overview**

Contemporary Reformed thought on freedom and responsibility has not been all of a piece. There are many reasons for this, and while one could speculate as to the reasons, doing so would not be helpful for our purposes. Part of the problem, though, is that the structure of the early and scholastic Reformers' discussions makes it hard to tell where they are agreeing and where they are deviating from current discussions. For example, it is known that many Reformers did not like the term 'free will,' and choosing is often cast in terms of metaphysical opposites (e.g., good/evil) rather than alternative possibilities. Furthermore, it was popular to discuss freedom in terms of the (lack of) bondage of the will to sin. So, while their discussions sometimes touch on and intersect with modern concerns, the contemporary questions are different. As Paul Helm remarks, "Philosophical debate since the time of Calvin has divided the conceptual cake somewhat differently."<sup>23</sup> This is not to place a value on one set of questions or concerns over another; it's just to point out the difficulties in mapping older discussions directly onto newer ones.

Moreover, since this issue is largely a matter of philosophical theology, as the skills, tools, and knowledge of philosophy grows, so might our ability to think about this topic and the implications it has for human freedom and responsibility.

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<sup>23</sup> Paul Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas* (Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 164.

As Carl Trueman puts it, given the biblical and confessional data on *RT*, the philosophical theologian's task is to elaborate "the necessary ontological framework and logical consequences of such statements. This is not autonomous metaphysics and logic gone mad; rather, it is them being used to explain how and why these Scriptural statements can be said to be coherent and what they can be said to imply."<sup>24</sup> The ontological framework and logical implications are not matters of confessional orthodoxy. Thus, we might expect more coherence and elaboration as we work out what *RT* metaphysically presupposes and implies, especially as philosophical theologians, who specialize in these kinds of things, do this.

What *RT* means for human freedom and responsibility is largely a matter of *entailment*, a logical and philosophical notion. So we must not mistake what some Reformers might have said about free will that seem to imply they viewed it as inconsistent with determinism for what the doctrines state or imply. Rather, we must ask what *RT* entails about free will and moral responsibility. It is with Jonathan Edwards that we begin to see the first attempt to rigorously and consistently apply the implications and presuppositions of Reformed thought on God's decree, providence, and knowledge.<sup>25</sup> Thus, historian of philosophy Bruce Kuklick notes, "Before Edwards, Calvinists and their opponents had not thought through consistently what we now understand to be entailed by the demands of determinism and freedom."<sup>26</sup> While Kuklick overstates matters here,<sup>27</sup> he is

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<sup>24</sup> Carl Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Ashgate, 2007), p. 65.

<sup>25</sup> See Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will* (1754), available online at <<http://edwards.yale.edu/research/major-works/freedom-of-the-will/>>, last accessed 7/12/11.

<sup>26</sup> Bruce Kuklick, *A History of Philosophy in America 1720-2000* (Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 20.

correct to point out that this is largely a matter of the logical implication.

After Edwards, though there is still a working out going on, we definitely see a more self-conscious turn in the writings of Reformed theologians as it pertains to the metaphysical doctrines Reformed theology is committed to. As knowledge increased in these matters and the logical implications of Reformed theology became clearer, we begin to find many positive references to ‘determinism’ by Reformed theologians. This is not to endorse Edwards’s views, but criticisms of him in this matter have been, I think, unfair. Edwards was not so much departing from the Reformed course as he was forging ahead into uncharted territories. Thus, I think it is helpful to distinguish between the broad metaphysical issues Reformed theology entails, and the various *models* of how to understand the biblical and confessional data. The former is a set of commitments (to be discussed below) essential to Reformed theology, the latter is more like the project of natural theology or natural law. We use reason, the facts of the world, logic, and other conceptual tools to help make clear and consistent, or to explicate, the broad theological and confessional baseline.

### 3.2 Reformed theology as a kind of determinism

In what follows, I will seek to show that Reformed theology is a species of determinism. Specifically, I will point out that this is shown by the doctrines of the decree, providence, and omniscience, i.e., *RT*. In this paper, I am using ‘Reformed’ in a very broad sense to include any who affirm the statements of these doctrines as found in the Reformed confessions. I will cite from the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (WCF) to make this case. From WCF, chapter

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<sup>27</sup> For example, see the assessment of Colleen McClusky, in *Medieval Theories of Free Will*, section 1 (IEP), <http://www.iep.utm.edu/freewi-m/>: last accessed 7/11/11, though I disagree with her claim that all the Medievals were libertarian.

three, we read:

1. God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel 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 will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.

2. Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions, yet hath he not decreed anything because he foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions.

And from chapter five:

1. God the great Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.

2. Although, in relation to the foreknowledge 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.

4. The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God so far manifest themselves in his providence, that it extendeth itself even to the first fall, and all other sins of angels and men; and that not by a bare permission, but such as hath joined with it a most wise and

powerful bounding, and otherwise ordering, and governing of them, in a manifold dispensation, to his own holy ends; yet so, as the sinfulness thereof proceedeth only from the creature, and not from God, who, being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin.

The *Westminster Larger Catechism* agrees when it asks and answers this question:

Q. 12. *What are the decrees of God?*

A. God's decrees are the wise, free, and holy acts of the counsel of his will, whereby, from all eternity, he hath, for his own glory, unchangeably foreordained whatsoever comes to pass in time, especially concerning angels and men.

And similarly with respect to providence:

Q. 18. *What are God's works of providence?*

A. God's works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures; ordering them, and all their actions, to his own glory.<sup>28</sup>

The *1689 London Baptist Confession* is almost word-for-word identical with the WCF on these topics. Other Reformed confessions, like the *Three Forms of Unity*, focus more on God's decree and providence as it relates to salvation. In these areas, they make the same claims about their narrower subject matter as the

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<sup>28</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms* (1788) available at <<http://www.opc.org/confessions.html>>, last accessed 7/2/11.

above confessions and catechisms do about their broader subject matter. Indeed, generally the Reformed tradition has treated issues of salvation as a *subset* of things addressed by *RT*. Michael Horton, who confesses the *Three Forms of Unity*, agrees with Turretin that God's "predetermination" extends "to *all* human decisions and actions." Horton continues, "Foremost, the Scriptures clearly attribute God's superintendence to all creaturely affairs and not simply matters pertaining to salvation."<sup>29</sup> Moreover, R. Scott Clark, regarded expert on early Reformed orthodoxy, writes that the authors of the *broad* Reformed tradition "confess that . . . *nothing* occurs outside [God's] decree."<sup>30</sup> So, there is good precedent say that the Reformed confessions I did not cite would agree with the Reformed confessions that I did cite on this topic. Therefore, what I have cited above is universally confessed by a broad Reformed tradition.

From the above we can draw out some basic points. We note that *whatever* happens, God has decreed that it happen and his decree is grounded in his will. We note that the decree is "settled," it is "unchangeable." We note that God does not decree anything because he saw it as future or because he knows a set of truths about what free creatures would do in certain conditions (which rules out systems like Molinism<sup>31</sup>). For God to know anything that occurs all he needs

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<sup>29</sup> Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Zondervan, 2011), p. 358.

<sup>30</sup> R. Scott Clark, *Recovering the Reformed Confession: Our Theology, Piety, and Practice* (P&R, 2008), p. 202.

<sup>31</sup> Molinism is a view about how God can have a strong degree of providential control over the world while also allowing humans to have libertarian free will. He can through his "middle knowledge" (something the Reformed tradition rejects) of what all possible people *would* freely do in any circumstance. He then creates a world with the exact circumstances he needs to bring about his plan. This is the footnote version of an issue that has generated thousands of pages of literature, e.g., see, Thomas Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Cornell University Press, 2006); W. L. Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and*

to do is consult his plan. In fact, the decree is just another word for plan. If something, *anything*, happens, then God decreed and planned that it happen.

Moreover, God ensures that everything he has decreed or planned will come about by his governing all things to that end. And we note that according to the decree of God, everything that happens comes to pass immutably. Clearly, then, if God decrees that something will come to pass, it *must* come to pass. *Given the decree*, things could not be otherwise than they are. As Turretin states,

Although men's actions may be free (because done spontaneously and by a previous judgment of reason), they do not cease to be necessary with respect to the divine decree and foreknowledge. Now the foreknowledge of God implies indeed the infallibility of futurity and of the event and the necessity of consequence, and yet does not imply coercion or violence, nor take away from the will its intrinsic liberty.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, the decrees imply a kind of necessity about our actions, and yet we note that man is not forced or coerced to do what he does, and he is morally responsible for his actions.

Given these confessional commitments, B. B. Warfield could say, "God foreknows only because he has pre-determined," and his foreknowledge "is at bottom a knowledge of his own will, and his works of providence are merely the execution of his all-embracing plan," for his will is "the real ultimate ground of future events," so that his decree can be seen as "predetermining every event that comes to pass."<sup>33</sup> Likewise, Thomas Boston writes,

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*Human Freedom* (Wipf & Stock, 2000); and Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* (B&H Academic, 2010).

<sup>32</sup> Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (P&R, 1992), III.12.24, p. 211.

<sup>33</sup> Fred Zaspel, *The Theology of B. B. Warfield: A Systematic Summary* (Crossway, 2010) p. 204.



Hence we see God's certain knowledge of all things that happen in the world, seeing his knowledge is founded on his decree. As he sees all things possible in the telescope of his own power, so he sees all things to come in the telescope of his own will; of his effecting will, if he hath decreed to produce them; and of his permitting will, if he hath decreed to allow them. Therefore his declaration of things to come is founded on his appointing them . . .<sup>34</sup>

We see here that the ground of God's foreknowledge is God's decree according to the counsel of his will. The truths about all that happens in time are ultimately grounded in God, not in the creature. Moreover, we see that for God to know anything that happens, all he needs to do is consult what he has decreed to happen.

Berkhof is also representative, writing that "Reformed theology stresses the sovereignty of God in virtue of which he has sovereignly determined from all eternity whatsoever will come to pass, and works his sovereign will in His entire creation, both natural and spiritual, according to his pre-determined plan." Thus, the "decree of God bears the closest relation to divine knowledge. There is in God, as we have seen, a necessary knowledge, including all possible causes and results. This knowledge furnishes the material for the decree; it is the perfect fountain out of which God drew the thoughts that He desired to objectify. Out of this knowledge of all things possible He chose, by an act of His perfect will, led by wise considerations, what he wanted to bring to realization, and thus formed His eternal purpose." What is decreed "shall certainly be future," and God "need not change His decree because of a mistake of ignorance nor because of an inability

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<sup>34</sup> Thomas Boston, "Important Lessons Drawn from the Decrees of God," *Fire and Ice Puritan and Reformed Writings*, online here, <<http://www.puritansermons.com/boston/bost8.htm>>, last accessed 7/12/11.

to carry it out. And he will not change it.” Now, the “execution of the plan may require means or be dependent on certain conditions, but then these means or conditions have also been determined in the decree.” And again, “the decree includes whatsoever comes to pass in the world, whether it be in the physical or in the moral realm, whether it be good or evil.”<sup>35</sup>

These statements are representative and could be easily multiplied. They explicate the Reformed understanding of God’s decree, providence, and knowledge. Given the above, we can generalize from this to a particular, arbitrary example. Consider Bob. Bob eats Lucky Charms for cereal on some particular rainy morning. We know that God decreed this to happen (“all things”) and that Bob cannot eat grape-nuts if God has decreed he will eat Lucky Charms (“unchangeable”), and that the ultimate source of Bob’s action was the decree of God (“after the counsel of his will,” “from all eternity”).<sup>36</sup> However, the decree is free on God’s part<sup>37</sup> and he just as easily could have decreed that Bob eat grape-nuts, from which it would follow that Bob certainly would eat grape-nuts—it *must* occur given the decree. So, what Bob does is not absolutely necessary, it is contingent upon the divine decree. This explication has certain implications for free will; pretty clearly, what we have here is a kind of determinism.

### 3.3 A kind of determinism?

What is **determinism**? According to Richard Taylor, “Determinism is the general

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<sup>35</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 100-105.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Boston writes, “Whoever may be the instruments of any good to us, of whatever sort, we must look above them, and see the hand and counsel of God in it, *which is their first source*,” “Important Lessons Drawn from the Decrees of God,” *ibid.* fn. 30.

<sup>37</sup> I bypass the issue of God’s freedom in this paper. I do think it is a *sui-generis* (completely unique) type of freedom. This topic is ripe for philosophical research and I leave the detailed and complicated questions to the side.

philosophical thesis which states that for everything that ever happens there are conditions such that, given them, nothing else could happen.”<sup>38</sup> Robert Kane elaborates,

In more familiar terms, we say that a determined event is *inevitable* or *necessary* (it cannot but occur), given the determining conditions. If fate decreed or God foreordained (or the laws of nature or antecedent causes determined) that John would choose at a certain time to go to Samarra, then John *will* choose at that time to go to Samarra. Determinism is thus a kind of necessity, but it is a conditional necessity. A determined event does not have to occur, no matter what else happens (it need not be *absolutely* necessary). But it must occur when the determining conditions have occurred. If the decrees of [God] had been different or the past had been different in some way, John may have been determined to go to Damascus rather than to Samarra. Historical doctrines of determinism imply that every event, or at least every human choice and action, is determined by some determining conditions in this sense.<sup>39</sup>

On this understanding of determinism conjoined with *RT*, it becomes easy to see why almost everyone who has thought deeply about these matters—Reformed and non-Reformed—has called Reformed theology a species of determinism. But what about Reformed theologians who have claimed Reformed theology is not deterministic, like those cited in 1.2.1? I suggest that those Reformed theologians who have said that Reformed theology is not deterministic can be understood, then, to be operating with some special sense of determinism: perhaps occasionalism, naturalistic causal determinism, absolute necessitation or logical

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<sup>38</sup> Richard Taylor, “Determinism,” in Paul Edwards ed. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, v.2 (Macmillan, 1972), p. 359.

<sup>39</sup> Robert Kane, *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will* (Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 6, emphasis original.

determinism.<sup>40</sup> But given the confessional statements and their explications, conjoined with our definition of determinism, Reformed theology *is* deterministic. Call this ‘determinism *simpliciter*,’ if you like.

Thus, while Taylor and Kane’s definitions are fairly broad, that is to their credit. Notice that these definitions do not commit a Reformed determinist to some specific *model* of determinism. The Reformed confessions seem to rule out at least *some* models of determinism. For example, chapter nine of the *Westminster Confession* reads: “God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty, that it is neither forced, nor, by any absolute necessity of nature, determined to good, or evil.” Even regarding causal determinism, the idea that every event is necessitated by antecedent events or conditions, our definition doesn’t commit one to a specific model of causal determinism. For instance, it need not commit the Reformed Christian to any sort of mechanistic, natural or physical causation, which would add in natural laws to the above definition of causal determinism. As John Feinberg points out,

Though some think determinism in the physical world also applies to human action, it is dubious that it does. Moreover, it is critical to understand that Calvinistic determinists with respect to human actions do not mean by determinism the sort that operates in the natural world. Because Calvinist determinists are not postulating that physical determinism governs human actions, objections to Calvinist determinists that misconstrue it as physical determinism are simply misguided and in

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<sup>40</sup> *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Collier-MacMillan, 1967) Vol. 2 cites numerous forms of determinism: (i) ethical determinism, (ii) logical determinism, (iii) theological determinism, (iv), physical determinism, (v) psychological determinism, pp. 372–373; but there’s more, e.g., (vi) causal determinism, and (vii) teleological determinism, and each of these sub-sets of determinisms admits of sub-sets of models.

no way refute Calvinism.<sup>41</sup>

Moreover, divine-causation isn't like models of ordinary causation, for it's *sui-generis* (i.e., one of a kind, in its own category, etc.). Lastly, this definition allows wide views in matters of empirical science. For example, if quantum indeterminism obtains, that would not falsify determinism in this broad sense, i.e., determinism *per se* or determinism *simpliciter*.<sup>42</sup> So I think this non-model-specific definition is a wise one for Reformed theologians to endorse.

Suppose we view all the possible models of determinism as members of the set of possible determining conditions, D. So,  $D = \{D_1, D_2, D_3, D_4, \dots D_n\}$ . I am claiming that those who deny Reformed theology is deterministic are denying that it is one or more members of the set D. However, I am claiming that Reformed theology affirms at least one member of the set D. So, that Reformed theology is not Stoic determinism, "philosophical determinism,"<sup>43</sup> Cartesian determinism, physicalist causal determinism, logical determinism, etc., does not imply that it is not a kind of determinism. For lack of a better term, I will call it "theological determinism."

### 3.4 A Reformed perimeter fence

Based on our very short look at where Reformed theology is situated in discussions of freedom and moral responsibility, I think we can walk away with some propositions out of which we can construct a perimeter fence that I think all Reformed Christians who agree with the Confessional statements I cited should at least agree with:

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<sup>41</sup> John Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Crossway, 2001), p. 632.

<sup>42</sup> Quantum indetermied particles would not be absolutely indeterminate, they would be indeterminate *with respect to* laws of physics, not with respect to God's decree. Thus, one would not be able to predict their future location *given laws of physics*, yet God (or anyone he tells) could still predict it for he determined it.

<sup>43</sup> A term I have seen Richard Muller employ several times, though I'm not entirely clear what it means.

- Whatsoever happens in creation happens because God has decreed it.
- If God decrees that something occur, then it will certainly occur; it must occur given the decree.
- God could have decreed otherwise than he did, in which case we would have done otherwise (or maybe not even existed).
- God knows all that will happen in creation because God has decreed it to occur. His knowledge here is based on his decree, and not vice versa.
- Though God decrees whatsoever comes to pass, man is responsible for his actions.
- The ultimate source of our actions is God's decree grounded in his will. God is ultimately responsible for all that occurs (note a distinction: being ultimately *responsible* for something does not necessarily imply that you are morally *culpable* for that thing).
- Given God's decree, we cannot do otherwise than he has decreed. Given identical decrees, identical decreed results will always happen.
- This is a kind of determinism, a kind of necessity to our actions, but it is a conditional necessity and not an absolute one.
- God executes his decree in history by his providential governing of all things to their appointed ends. How he does this is not known but may be speculated on.
- Affirming determinism does not entail affirming a specific model of *how* God makes sure whatsoever he has decreed comes to pass. Reformed believers are free to develop and work out models so long as they are consistent with the

above.

Of course, a full scriptural defense of the above would be needed to show that the Reformed view is something more than man's opinion. It should first be pointed out that the concern of this paper is not to give the exegetical foundations for the Reformed position on the decree, providence, and God's foreknowledge. Rather, I am simply drawing out in broad ways what affirming *RT* commits one to. I am not asking too much by this commitment, as I have argued that commitment to determinism *simpliciter* leaves quite a bit of leeway for how one might put the various pieces together (more on this below).

Nevertheless, one does not need to go far to find the scriptural support for these Reformed convictions. One may read Calvin's *Institutes*, Turretin's *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, and Shedd's *Dogmatic Theology* for good analysis of the scriptural data in support of the Reformed understanding of the decree, providence, and omniscience. More modern theologians would include the systematic theologies of Berkhof, Reymond, and Grudem. Lastly, two excellent discussions concerning the biblical data in support of the Reformed views of the decree, providence, and God's foreknowledge as it relates to these, can be found in the doctrine of God books by John Feinberg and John Frame (see the "further reading" section at the end of this paper for details).

### 3.5 Nature determinism vs. act determinism

One issue I should address is what I'll refer to as 'nature determinism' and 'act determinism.'<sup>44</sup> Nature determinism means that we must act according to our internal natures. Humans cannot choose to flap their arms and fly to the top of a

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<sup>44</sup> This distinction is based off John Feinberg's remarks on what he calls Necessity<sub>1</sub> and Necessity<sub>2</sub>, corresponding to what I'm calling 'act determinism' and 'nature determinism,' respectively. See Feinberg, *No One Like Him* (Crossway, 2001), 636.

tree. On this view, our nature determines the things we can choose. This nature does not always have to be essential to us. It could be something like our “sinful nature.” Act determinism means that our individual acts (going to the store, eating pizza for lunch, etc.) are determined, either by our characters, by laws of nature and our actual history, by fate, or God’s decrees, etc.).

Now sometimes, Reformed thinkers have used nature determinism to show act determinism. They have said that given total depravity, we always choose to do what is sinful. The claim is, “we always choose according to our nature.” The idea here is often expressed by a popular analogy Reformed Christians have employed over the years. It goes like this: if you put a salad and a raw, bloody steak in front of a lion, he will *always* go for the steak. Now maybe this is true, I don’t know, but the point is easy enough to grasp. The conclusion is then drawn that because we are sinners by nature, we always choose to sin. It is then sometimes thought that this refutes Arminian objections to Reformed theology and refutes libertarian free will.

The problem here is that the analogy is rigged. What do we say if a salad, a bloody steak, and a gazelle flank are placed before the lion? The lion’s nature may determine the *kinds* of food he will eat, but it doesn’t need to determine that he take the steak over the gazelle, for they are of the same kind (meat). If it did determine which meat the lion had to choose, this would be *act* determinism. But the Arminian or libertarian will object that while it may be true that we always choose or act sinfully, this doesn’t imply that what we specifically choose or how we specifically act is determined. There may be a *range* of sinful options to choose from. This is the same with God. It is sometimes said that because God is necessarily good, this proves God’s freedom is compatible with inability to do otherwise. But this is ambiguous, and overlooks that there need not be just one



good thing for God to choose. While God may not be able to do other than good, He may have many good options to choose from. The Arminian will say that there's no reason to think God has only one choice he can make just because he must always choose good.

Reformed Christians who use the above argument to refute Arminian conceptions of man's freedom are not making the kind of progress that needs to be made. It is often thought that the lion story quells the worries of the Arminian. But, it only does so by uncharitably assuming that Arminianism entails that we don't choose according to our nature, or that we have the ability to lead sinless lives (no doubt, some Arminians have said this, but it's not an entailment of Arminianism), and by confusing nature determinism with act determinism. Reformed theology entails both, but it is the latter Arminians object to. However, there may be something to this argument in response to ultimate sourcehood or responsibility. But to make that argument other premises would need to be invoked and Arminians might deny those. In any case, the argument would need to be developed and doing so is beyond our scope.

#### **4. Reformed Theology, Free Will and Moral Responsibility**

Given that Reformed theology is a type of determinism, how must it understand free will and moral responsibility? It cannot deny that we are morally responsible, for our perimeter fence will not allow us thoroughfare in that direction. Also, if man is to have freedom, our perimeter fence will not allow us to hold to libertarian theories of free will along with their attendant constraints, like the principle of alternative possibilities and ultimate sourcehood (cf. sec. 2.2 and 2.3). Pretty clearly, then, Reformed theology will need to invoke some kind of **compatibilism**. That is, it will have to say that our free and morally responsible

actions are compatible with those actions being determined. But how are we to understand this? How can we be free if we must do what we have been decreed to do? How can we be free if we don't have live, alternative possibilities open to us, any of which we can bring about through an act of will? That is, how can we be morally responsible if we cannot do other than we do? If we cannot refrain from doing what we are decreed to do? How can we be free or responsible if we are not the *ultimate* source of our actions? I would like to provide a bare bones look at two particular compatibilist models Reformed Christians have been attracted to over the years.

#### 4.1 Classical Compatibilism

By far, the majority position in Reformed thought on free will has been what is referred to as the **classical compatibilist** model. This view begins by asking what we normally mean when we say that we did something freely. For instance, when we say we are free to choose Lucky Charms for breakfast we ordinarily seem to mean that we have some kind of power or ability such that if we were to want or decide or desire to eat Lucky Charms for breakfast, then we could do so.

Furthermore, by saying we are free we ordinarily mean that we are not constrained, forced, coerced or blocked from doing what we want to do. So, classical compatibilism says that we are free when (1) we are able to do what we want or desire to do, and (2) when there is an absence of constraints keeping us from doing what we want to do, or forcing us to do what we don't want to do.

You will recall that the ability to do otherwise seemed to be an important requirement for freedom and responsibility (sec. 2.2), and that determinism seemed to rule this ability out. Classical compatibilism claims that there is a sense in which we can do otherwise than we do and that this sense is compatible with determinism. So, can we do otherwise than eat Lucky Charms? Classical

compatibilism answers that we can insofar as we have a power or ability to avoid eating Lucky Charms and there are no constraints keeping us from not eating Lucky Charms. So in answer to the “could you do otherwise” question, classical compatibilism says you could do otherwise in this sense: *if* you had wanted to do otherwise, then you *would* have. The point here is that “can” in the question “can you do otherwise” is ambiguous. Thus, as long as “freedom to do otherwise” is given this hypothetical gloss, classical compatibilism allows for ability to do otherwise. This is compatible with doing otherwise given God’s decree of all things. For if we had wanted to do something different, then this would mean that there was a different decree, and so we would do that thing. No doubt, God also determines our wants and desires, but they are nevertheless ours, not God’s. It is *Bob* who desires to eat Lucky Charms, no one else. And though God is the ultimate source of these desires, they nevertheless run “through” us and are produced by us in a relevant way. They are self-determined in the sense that they derivatively originate in us and by us and were not forced upon us against our will.

For the Reformed classical compatibilist, not only does this give us freedom in a very real sense, but it also allows for God to hold us morally responsible and morally culpable. For sinners, though determined, still do what they want or desire to do. This is all compatible with determinism, for determinism does not necessarily entail constraint, coercion, or compulsion. Neither does being caused to do something entail being constrained to do it. Indeed, to remove any cause whatsoever from your action would be to make your action *uncaused* and thus accidental, irrational, or a matter of luck. So, *causes* don’t automatically rule out freedom, it’s the *kind* of causes that do. And classical compatibilists tell us that the relevant freedom-cancelling causes are things like constraining, forcing against your will, impeding, etc. Thus, as long as God’s decrees do not force or

coerce us into doing what we do not want to do, then our free actions are not incompatible with this determining condition. And, since we do what we want to do, what we desire to do, God may punish us for sinning. For clearly, we are told, if someone wanted to steal something and was not forced to steal, then that person is morally responsible for stealing.

## 4.2 The Consequence Argument

No doubt the above was an extremely brief run-down of classical compatibilism, and while it may have brought up more questions than it answered, I hope you have a feel for how it claims freedom and determinism are compatible. Still, there is one powerful argument that seeks to show that freedom and moral responsibility are not compatible with determinism, it's call **the consequence argument** and it argues that essential features of *determinism* rule out freedom. In its simplest form, the argument runs like this,

If determinism is true, then our acts are the consequences of [insert prior determining conditions] in the past. But it is not up to us what went on before we were born; and neither is it up to us what the [insert determining conditions] are. Therefore the consequences of these things (including our own acts) are not up to us.<sup>45</sup>

This says there is nothing we can do to change the past, or to change the past determining conditions, or to change the fact that what we will do is the consequence of these things. Therefore, we cannot now do otherwise than we actually do.

This argument has generated a lot of literature on all sides of the debate. Most

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<sup>45</sup> Peter van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 16.

incompatibilists agree with it, and so do some compatibilists. Given our above overview of classical compatibilism, we know how they would respond to it: they say that the use of “can” in the argument is ambiguous. They say that their hypothetical analysis is compatible with determinism, and so the argument has true premises and a false conclusion. Incompatibilists respond by saying that this proves that the hypothetical reading of “can” has gone wrong. They claim it is *ad hoc* and it was manufactured to give an account of ‘can’ that is compatible with determinism. But, we don’t normally mean by ‘can’ this hypothetical understanding—for what good is a power or ability we can never *actually* exercise? Classical compatibilists respond in kind by saying that the ‘can’ used in the argument has been rigged with an incompatibilist meaning. But apart from that rigging, a perfectly fine interpretation of ‘can’ has been given. At this point, the argument between the two sides reaches an impasse.

#### 4.3 Semi-compatibilism

The above back-and-forth can be dizzying. I don’t bring up the consequence argument to cause (!) readers to throw up their hands and declare, “Who can figure these things out?” Again, for our purposes I am trying to give a broad overview of this topic and orientate readers with some of the relevant moves in the debate. This allows for a big picture understanding of the forest without an up-close and time-consuming inspection of each tree. I also bring up the consequence argument because it segues nicely into our next compatibilist model, what is referred to as semi-compatibilism.

Not all compatibilists are classical compatibilists. While almost everyone has agreed that classical compatibilists have indeed identified *some* things that must be true if our actions are to be free and morally responsible, they claim that they do not identify *enough* things. At best, we are told, classical compatibilism allows

for a kind of surface freedom, but certainly it does not allow for any deep freedom, the kind needed for moral responsibility. Why think, we're told, that in cases like Huxley's *Brave New World*, where intellectual elites "manipulate" the citizens to want and desire the things the elites want them to want and desire, that the citizens are really free? Sure, they can do everything they want, but their wants have been given to them, and so it does not seem like their *will* is free. This brings up an important distinction between free *will* and free *action*. It appears you can have the latter but lack the former. Newer compatibilists have located other problems inherent in the very premises of classical compatibilism, especially with respect to the hypothetical analysis of 'can.' Of course, classical compatibilists have their responses to all of this—and usually it's to refine classical compatibilism and make it resistant to these criticisms. My purpose here is not to weigh in on any side of the debate; I am just presenting the current state of the debate.

Suppose we found the consequence argument plausible and are not as enamored with classical compatibilism and its hypothetical analysis of 'can' as some people are. What should we do then? Would we have to admit that determinism is incompatible with free will and moral responsibility? Perhaps become **hard incompatibilists** who affirm determinism and deny that we are free and morally responsible? Many compatibilists have answered no. They have claimed that the only kind of free will we need is that which allows us to be morally responsible for our actions. To be responsible in this sense is to be a "fit" subject of certain attitudes others in our moral community have of our actions and us. These attitudes, e.g., admiration, disapproval, resentment, blame, forgiveness, indignation, etc., result in an evaluation towards or of members of our moral community.

These kinds of attitudes are called **reactive attitudes**, and being the proper subject of them, or having them, is part of what makes us human. To deny this about ourselves would be to deny our humanness. It would be irrational. For it seems basic and obvious to us that some people are the appropriate subjects of harsh indignation or kind praise. For many, it would be extremely difficult to deny these truths about us upon finding out that determinism obtained. Even Peter van Inwagen, famous non-determinist, has stated that if he one day came to believe in determinism he would have to reconsider his belief that determinism is incompatible with moral responsibility.<sup>46</sup> This is because the belief that we are morally responsible for at least some of our actions is such a primal and basic element to our humanness that it cannot conceivably be eradicated.

In getting to the topic of this section, one theory of reactive attitudes has been dubbed **semi-compatibilism**, the second kind of compatibilism I said I would discuss. The reason for the name is this: semi-compatibilists accept the consequence argument, and thus accept that we cannot do other than what we are determined to do. They deny the hypothetical analysis of 'can' and claim it is fraught with problems, and so claim that freedom (in the sense of ability to do otherwise) cannot be had on determinism. However, they claim that moral responsibility does not require ability to do otherwise. So it's 'semi-' compatibilism: compatibilism about moral responsibility, incompatibilism about ability to do otherwise. Reformed theologians might be interested in this model since the Bible has little if anything to say about free will but much to say about moral responsibility. What really matters, they say, is that God's determining decrees are compatible with his holding us morally responsible and culpable for our determined actions.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 219.

How do semi-compatibilists show that ability to do otherwise is not required for moral responsibility? They have a few ways, one of which is to appeal to what is known as **Frankfurt-style counterexamples**, named after philosopher Harry Frankfurt, to show this. While these counterexamples have generated a tremendous amount of back-and-forth in the literature, and the debate can get quite sophisticated, in keeping with our broad overview approach I will offer a run of the mill example:

Suppose Jones wants to kill the president. Black, an evil neurosurgeon who dislikes the president, finds out Jones's plans. Black is happy about this turn of events but doesn't want to leave matters to indeterminist chance. So he drugs Jones and renders him unconscious. While Jones is unconscious, Black implants a neural monitoring device in Jones's head that enables Black to tell what Jones is going to do before he does it. The device is equipped with an "overrider button" that allows the controller to override the subject's control and switches control to something that looks like a joy stick, allowing the controller to manipulate the subject to do what he wants him to do. Thus, reasons Black, "If Jones opts to back out at the last moment, I will press the overrider button and ensure that Jones goes through with the plan [insert evil laugh and rubbing together of hands]." When the day arrives, Jones heads down to the designated area with rifle in hand. Jones sets up and as the president approaches he stays resolved and carries out the assassination. Black, therefore, never needed to press the overrider button. Jones killed the president of his own free will, and certainly appears to be morally responsible for his actions. However, and here's the kicker, Jones *couldn't have done otherwise than he did*. For, if he had given any indication that he might do otherwise, Black would have pressed the overrider button. So, either Jones freely



commits murder or is coerced to kill; in either case, he kills and cannot do otherwise than kill. Therefore, moral responsibility does *not* require the ability to do otherwise.<sup>47</sup>

But if moral responsibility does not require the ability to do otherwise, what does it require? Semi-compatibilists say that moral responsibility requires *control*. Someone who acts in a morally responsible way must be in control of his or her action. They then make a further distinction between two kinds of control: **regulative control** and **guidance control**. The former requires the ability to do otherwise, the latter does not; and it is only the latter, they argue, that is required for responsibility. To give an example of the latter kind, suppose your steering wheel is locked and will eventually force your car to the right. You, however, have planned to turn right in order to go to the gas station. At the moment the wheel will turn your car right if you were to keep going straight or maybe turn left, you turn your car to the right and “guide” it into the gas station. This is to exhibit a certain kind of control over the car, guidance control. And this kind of control doesn’t require alternative possibilities, it requires being responsive to reasons. This means you guide your car (in our example) to the right for reasons or motives rather than, say, out of a compulsive habit to turn into gas stations and purchase Oreo cookies even if you had reasons to go to the left.

But guidance control is not enough for responsibility. A compulsive Oreo cookie addict will also exhibit guidance control in grabbing the tray of double stuffed Oreos, and she will do so for reasons and motives. So what else do semi-

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<sup>47</sup> This is my own example, but it is similar to other ones. In another one the relevant action was “voting,” but oddly enough, some Reformed Christians who refer to themselves as “two kingdoms” have said that we are *not* morally responsible for our voting (!), thus I used an example for which there should be no debate.

compatibilists say is needed for moral responsibility? They claim that the morally responsible individual would have to be responsive to different reasons (**reasons responsiveness**) if she or he were to have them. The turning of the car could not be done out of compulsion, something done regardless of reasons to the contrary. On top of this, they argue that the reasoning mechanism must be the person's 'own,' and that he or she would 'take responsibility' or 'ownership' of their actions, especially when they have been informed of the determinism involved.

Again, this was an extremely abbreviated overview of semi-compatibilism, and it was a little longer than the section on classical compatibilism due to the "set up" time, but I hope it gives a general feel for what is involved in this move. No doubt, many questions and criticisms can be (and have been!) raised against this view, but my purpose was not to address all of the issues surrounding these views, much less give any knockdown argument for them, but simply to report two popular *models* of compatibilism that can roam comfortably within our perimeter fence. If these models don't suit the reader's appetite you are free (!) to come up with your own—or latch on to one of the many other models out there—as long as you stay within the fence.

## **5. Libertarian accounts of freedom and moral responsibility**

### **5.1 Libertarian free will: the basics**

By far, the most popular view of free will in Christianity, at least in modern times, is libertarian freedom. Libertarians claim that if we are morally responsible for our actions, then we have to be libertarian free, since moral responsibility requires certain things be true about us that could only be true if we were libertarian free. Christian libertarians also say that the picture the Bible gives

about the relationship God wants with us, as well as the real ability all men have to be saved, requires libertarian freedom. They also claim a truly loving relationship must be entered into freely; and this must allow for rejection, the possibility that the beloved may reject the love of the lover. Thus, they argue that they are libertarians because the Bible demands it, not because they hold it as a philosophical premise that cannot be questioned and with which the Bible must be forced to fit. But what are some basics about libertarian free will that Reformed Christians should know so that they may properly represent and understand their Christian brothers and sisters who are libertarian? I will try to highlight what I find to be some salient and relevant aspects of this view.

**Libertarians are incompatibilists.** That is, they believe free will and moral responsibility are incompatible with those acts being determined. With determinism, we saw that given some past or prior determining condition(s) certain events were conditionally necessary. If those condition(s) obtained, then what is determined must occur. So: same past, same future. On indeterminism, it is the opposite. Libertarian free will allows for the same past to yield multiple different futures. This means that people with free will have a future that forks or, better, branches out in several different directions. If you have libertarian freedom, then when you open your pantry and see all the boxes of cereal there, you have live alternate possible futures awaiting your choice. You really could choose the Lucky Charms, the grape-nuts, the Count Chocula, or you could refrain from eating anything at all. There is nothing that determines that you must do any of these things. Your future is wide open, as it were. Put differently, if Bob is libertarian free in possible world  $W_1$  and  $W_2$ , then both of these worlds could have identical pasts leading up to the moment Bob chooses his cereal, and Bob chooses Lucky Charms in  $W_1$  and grape-nuts in  $W_2$ .

Moreover, libertarians tell us, it just seems intuitively right that if you *ought* to do something, you *can* do it. Alternatively, if you ought not do something, you can refrain from doing it. What sense does it make, they ask, to hold a man responsible for not saving a drowning child if he could not save the child? Suppose he is in a wheel chair and so cannot swim. Would we say that he's morally culpable for not saving (or at least attempting to save) drowning children? Or, what if someone really just couldn't help blurting out swear words, perhaps someone suffering from Tourette's syndrome. Would we hold him morally responsible for blurting out obscenities during church? Libertarians claim it is the same with determinism. For on determinism we *cannot* do other than we do, but ought-implies-can, so no one can be morally responsible on determinism.

There is a certain intuitive appeal to all of this. For it certainly *seems* to me that I do have an open future, that I may *really* choose either the Lucky Charms or the grape-nuts, and that this fact is settled only when I actually choose one.

Libertarians say that our common sense assumptions fit best with their picture of the world, and they wonder why we would be so massively misled in this way, especially if God created us. But, libertarians must also admit that there are some surface cases that don't seem to fit their theory. For example, they are well aware that, say, a drunk driver cannot avoid certain collisions he might find himself about to get into yet still be held responsible for the accident. They also know of cases where it seems like we cannot do otherwise. Take Martin Luther for example. He is reported to have said, "I can do no other" at the famous Diet of Worms. Perhaps Luther's character would not allow him to do otherwise. Surely the libertarian knows that there are many people whose character has been formed such that they act in accordance with their character, unable to do otherwise. These are empirically indisputable facts and libertarianism would be an extreme position indeed if it had to deny them.

But libertarians do not need to deny the above. They can heartily affirm that there are many cases where morally responsible people act and cannot do otherwise. This doesn't contradict libertarianism though. For the libertarian claims that if a person is morally responsible for some action he could not avoid, then he must be morally responsible for putting himself in that position. Take the drunk. He may be responsible for killing someone in an auto accident even though he could not do otherwise at the time and was not in control of his actions, but this is only because he is morally responsible for putting himself in that position. Before he decided to drink, he had a choice, and he had an open future. He could have stayed home; he could have had a 7-Up. If it is claimed that he was an alcoholic and could not avoid drinking, then this just pushes the question back to when he made the libertarian free choices that eventually led to his alcoholism. The idea here is that morally responsible people must be the ultimate source and originators of their actions or in forming and setting their wills or character. As J. P. Moreland has put it, "We all seem to be aware of the fact that we are the absolute originators of our actions," and that "For libertarians it is only if agents are the first causes or unmoved movers that agents have the control necessary for freedom."<sup>48</sup>

## 5.2 Frankfurt libertarians

At this point there's some disagreement among libertarians. Some libertarians, called **Frankfurt libertarians**,<sup>49</sup> claim that the relevant factor required for moral responsibility is that the agent be the ultimate source of her actions, whether or not they have alternative possibilities available to them. They are libertarians

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<sup>48</sup> J. P. Moreland and Scott B. Rae, *Body & Soul: Human Nature and the Crisis of Ethics* (IVP Academic, 2000), pgs. 132 and 128, respectively.

<sup>49</sup> Some influential Frankfurt libertarians are: David Hunt (the philosopher), Eleonore Stump, Linda Zagzebski, and William Lane Craig.

because they claim that ultimate sourcehood is incompatible with our wills or character being determined by anything other than us. This view is also sometimes known as **narrow source incompatibilism**. Other libertarians, the majority, argue that there must at least be alternative possibilities at the time the person became the ultimate source of his action or character formation. They claim it makes no sense to claim that someone is ultimately responsible for choosing, acting, or forming their character if they could not have done otherwise at the time. They claim that the person must be *the* “difference-maker” in how the future turns out, and so alternative possibilities are loaded into the scenario. As Kevin Timpe puts it,

[I]f the agent is to be morally responsible for some feature of the future, she will be the difference-maker to the way that the future unfolds. But in order for this to be the case, there must be more than one future that is compossible with the [determining conditions] (or those parts of the past that were not themselves determined by the agent).<sup>50</sup>

So these libertarians claim that the principle of alternative possibilities (referred to as PAP) is needed at the time of character forming or will-setting, even if it is not needed afterwards. Not surprisingly, these libertarians are sometimes known as **wide source incompatibilists**. Wide source incompatibilism means that moral responsibility is incompatible with determinism and requires alternative possibilities at the moment of character forming or will-setting to ensure ultimate sourcehood.

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<sup>50</sup> Kevin Timpe, *Source Incompatibilism and its Alternatives*, p.17. The entire paper is a good introduction to the in-house debate and strongly argues for wide-source incompatibilism, see here: < <http://people.nnu.edu/ktimpe/research/source.pdf>>, last accessed, 7/11/11.

### 5.3 Agent causation

But still, libertarianism may look like a sketchy position. To some people it looks like libertarians are saying that there is no cause at all for why they choose or act the way they do. Would not this make their choices or actions the result of accidents or luck? But libertarians deny that just any cause of an action is freedom removing. It is only certain kinds of causes: the kind that rule out alternative possibilities, ultimate sourcehood, or both. But other kinds of causes are acceptable.<sup>51</sup> What are they? Here, the field is divided among libertarians.<sup>52</sup>

There are many answers libertarians give for why we choose and act the way we do, but here's the most popular among Christian thinkers (though there is not unanimous agreement): our actions are not uncaused, they are caused by us. We are the cause of our own actions, the buck stops with us. We choose according to reasons, though those reasons do not necessitate, and God, who is the paradigm example of someone who has agent-causal powers, has given us these powers.<sup>53</sup> This view is called the **agent-causal** view. J.P. Moreland expressed this view above, when he wrote: "For libertarians it is only if agents are the first causes or unmoved movers that agents have the control necessary for freedom." Moreland and Craig put it more elaborately:

Real freedom requires a type of control over one's action—and, more importantly, over one's will—such that, given a choice to do A (raise one's hand and vote) or B (leave the room), nothing determines that either

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<sup>51</sup> And not all libertarians even agree with this.

<sup>52</sup> See Randolph Clarke, "Incompatibilist (Non-determinist) Theories of Free Will," in SEP, < <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/incompatibilism-theories/>>, last accessed 7/18/11.

<sup>53</sup> For a libertarian perspective against the tight connection many theological libertarians draw between God's freedom and ours, see Timothy O'Connor, "Freedom with a Human Face," available online: <[http://www.indiana.edu/~scotus/files/Freedom\\_Hum\\_Face.pdf](http://www.indiana.edu/~scotus/files/Freedom_Hum_Face.pdf)>, last accessed 7/18/11.

choice is made. Rather, the agent himself must simply exercise his own causal powers and will to do one alternative, say A (or have the power to refrain from willing to do something). When this happens, the agent either could have refrained from willing to do A or he could have willed to do B . . . He is the absolute originator of his own actions. . . . [H]e is a first or unmoved mover.<sup>54</sup>

As with everything in this paper, the above is an extremely truncated overview of libertarianism. No doubt I did not do the view justice, but I hope, again, to have touched on some key themes and given a fair overview. Given this view of freedom and responsibility, what can the Reformed Christian say in response? She can appeal to several reasons in rejecting libertarianism, some of which I will discuss shortly. But first, an excursus: There is a movement afoot in the Reformed world to claim the Reformed view of the will was a kind of libertarianism. Since this directly contradicts my thesis, I will offer some critical remarks on this view.

## **Excursus: Reformed Libertarianism (or something near enough)?**

### **E.1 Introduction**

A topic I initially tried to avoid directly discussing, but one that a reader of an earlier draft thought would be good to address, is the issue of what I will call “Reformed Libertarianism (or something near enough).” The view is that Reformed theology, especially during the scholastic period, taught what we can call for lack of a better word, ‘libertarianism (or something near enough).’ The reason the designation is sketchy is that those who espouse the view we will discuss claim that it is not libertarian. But, they claim this given an odd and

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<sup>54</sup> J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations For a Christian Worldview* (IVP Academic, 2003), p. 270.



idiosyncratic definition of libertarianism as the view that we have some kind of absolute freedom and that we are utterly divorced from God's sovereignty. On this understanding of libertarianism their view may not be 'libertarian,' but that is an uninteresting point since not even libertarians are this kind of libertarian! At least, they need not be. As libertarian Kenneth Keathley puts it, "human freedom is both derived and genuinely ours. Scripture does not present human freedom as something absolute, unlimited, or autonomous."<sup>55</sup> Another reason for the sketchiness is that to be consistent with Reformed orthodoxy, *RT* is cashed out in a way that sounds deterministic (i.e., the broad definition given above), but then determinism is explicitly denied. On the other hand, when the alleged non-libertarian view of the will is cashed out, it sounds like classic libertarianism.

One reason I tried to avoid discussing this topic is because a study of it can hardly be done apart from employing the archaic terms that pepper the pages of those writing on this issue. Here's a sampling of terms used: "synchronic contingency," "diachronic contingency," "*potentia Dei absoluta*," "*potentia Dei ordinata*," "*necessitas consequentiis*," "*necessitas consequentiae*," "*scientia necessaria*," "*scientia voluntaria*," "*liberum arbitrium indifferentiae*," *ad nauseum*—I mean, those terms are used a lot! Moreover, this debate is involved in medieval metaphysics, theological voluntarism, the relation between God and time, specialized notions of determinism and contingency, modal logic, and a host of exegetical questions as to what this or that scholastic Reformer meant and to what extent he may or may not have, say, borrowed from thinkers such as Duns Scotus or Thomas Aquinas.

Nevertheless, I should make some introductory remarks on this view and on

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<sup>55</sup> Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* (B&H Academic, 2010), p. 10.

some of the problems it faces. This view is becoming increasingly popular, held to by Reformed theologians Andreas Beck, Richard Muller, Willem van Asselt, and Antonie Vos, among others. A recent book which defends the above notion was published in the “Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought” series,<sup>56</sup> which was positively blurb-ed by Westminster Seminary professor Carl Trueman. More recently, the esteemed Richard Muller gave a lecture at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School where he put forth this view, and his lecture was linked to without any commentary either way by Westminster California professor R. Scott Clark’s weblog. Another Reformed theologian, Kim Riddlebarger, linked to the Muller lecture at his weblog—again, without any critical comment—and called it “very helpful.” Interestingly, one can also see this view championed on the Internet by those who identify with the Barthian wing of Reformed theology. So the view seems to be picking up steam.

Since this position conflicts with my claim that Reformed theology is deterministic and that the freedom we have is best classified as a type of compatibilist freedom, what follows will be more critical than descriptive. This will also be the most difficult part of the paper, but maybe the most profitable for those who work through it. I also press the point that what follows is introductory, and so is not meant to be a sustained, rigorous, and comprehensive critique. Having duly protected myself with the “it wasn’t meant to be a rigorous critique” out, I will now set forth one of the main ideas of this view.

## E.2 Synchronic contingency

The idea is that Reformed scholasticism owes much to Duns Scotus’ alleged middle way between determinism and indeterminism, the idea of ‘synchronic

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<sup>56</sup> *Reformed Thought on Freedom: The Concept of Free Choice in Early Modern Reformed Theology*, ed. Willem J. van Asselt et al. (Baker Academic, 2010).

contingency.’ The basic idea of synchronic contingency can be expressed thus: “An actual state of affairs is associated with synchronic contingency when it could be non-actual at the very moment of time at which it is actual.”<sup>57</sup> More precisely, X is synchronically contingent at some time *t* if and only if X occurs at *t* and it is possible that X does not occur at *t*. In reference to an act of the will being synchronically contingent, we would have: someone S wills X at *t* and it is possible that S does not will X at *t*. Scotus and his interpreters have claimed that X is willed contingently at time *t* if and only if it is both logically and really possible to will not-X at *t*.

Many scholars have pointed out that Scotus is giving us classic libertarianism, especially when conjoined with his views on self-determination.<sup>58</sup> How someone’s particular action at a time becomes actualized is, ultimately, because God wills it.<sup>59</sup> Thus, it is argued that Reformed theology preserved contingency

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<sup>57</sup>“The Philosophy of Duns Scotus” by Simo Knuuttila, reviewed by A. Vos in *Ars Disputandi*, v.7 2007.

<sup>58</sup> See e.g., Thomas Williams, “John Duns Scotus,” entry for *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (SEP), <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/duns-scotus/>> last accessed 7/16/11, and *The Divine Nature and Scotus’ Libertarianism: A Reply to Mary Beth Ingham*, available online <<http://shell.cas.usf.edu/~thomasw/The%20Divine%20Nature%20and%20Scotus's%20Libertarianism.pdf>> 7/16/2011; Robert Pasnau, “Peter John Olivi,” entry for SEP, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/olivi/>>; Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus* (Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 100; Allan Wolter, review of “God’s Willing Knowledge by Douglas Langston,” in *Theological Studies*, 48 (1987), pp. 182–85.; Colleen McClusky, “Medieval Theories of Free Will,” entry for *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/freewi-m/>>, 7/16/11; and, James Frank, “Duns Scotus on Autonomous Freedom and Divine Co-Causality,” in *Medieval Philosophy and Theology*. Vol 2. Ed. By Norman Kretzmann, et al. (University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), pp. 142–64.

<sup>59</sup> Incidentally, because of this some have claimed Scotus is a compatibilist! See e.g., Douglas Langston, *God’s Willing Knowledge: The Influence of Scotus’ Analysis of Omniscience* (The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986), and “God’s Willing Knowledge, Redux,” in *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie Médiéval*sv. 77 n. 2 (2010), pp. 235–282; Michael Sylwanowicz, *Contingent Causality and the Foundation of Duns Scotus’ Metaphysic* (Brill Academic, 1996), p. 195, p. 195, n. 11,

and God's universal decree. Reformed theology is neither determinist nor indeterminist. However, this *via media* seems to me to be the minority interpretation as most scholars settle on indeterminism, with the majority of the rest settling on determinism. Further interpretive problems arise when we consider that some scholars have claimed that synchronic contingency applies only to God's freedom but man's freedom is analyzed in terms of diachronic contingency (i.e., S wills X at  $t_1$  but S can not-will X at  $t_2$ ). The latter here too seems to be the minority view; Scotus seemed to apply synchronic and diachronic contingency to man's will, but the former only to God's will. Perhaps the cause for much of these confusions is that, "For Scotus, the freedom of the human will is not the central issue . . . We are left to infer his views from discussions focusing mainly on the divine will—where the human or angelic will is brought in as foil, if it is mentioned at all."<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, we can set aside the debate about whether Scotus was a compatibilist or not, for if it is admitted that he was then I have nothing to argue against in this section. So, we will proceed upon the assumption that Scotus' view affirms that incompatibilism is true and that man is free and morally responsible, the *sine qua non* of libertarianism.<sup>61</sup>

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204–220; Anthony Kenny, *Medieval Philosophy: A New History of Western Philosophy*, Vol. 2 (Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 308–309; and Marilyn McCord Adams and Norman Kretzman's introduction to *William Ockham: Predestination, God's Foreknowledge, and Future Contingents* (Appleton, Century, Crofts, 1969), pp. 1–33. Yet, Adams notes the indeterministic tendencies in Scotus and so thinks it probable that Scotus is simply inconsistent, p. 50.

<sup>60</sup> Michael Sylwanowicz, *Contingent Causality and the Foundation of Duns Scotus' Metaphysic* (Brill Academic, 1996), p. 193. Also, Sylwanowicz's argument that Scotus was a compatibilist is very strong.

<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, either synchronic contingency is compatible with compatibilism or it is not. If it is, then I don't have major objections to this since my paper allows for the freedom to develop divergent models. Synchronic contingency is also either compatible with libertarianism or it is not. If it is not, then why isn't it? What about libertarianism rules out the compatibility? I can't see anything that does. Therefore,

### E.3 Objections

Assuming that some of the scholastic Reformers imbibed Scotus' views, what does this mean for us? Does that mean *RT* does not entail determinism? No. First, there is a distinction to be made between historic theology and what we'll call, for lack of a better word, normative theology. The former concerns what Christians have *in fact* believed, the latter concerns what they *should* believe. Minimally, we should believe some doctrine because it is true. Therefore, just because some Christians in history believed X, that doesn't entail that X is true and that we should therefore believe X. Now, there might be the "confessionalist response" which states that we should believe those things the founders of our tradition confessed if we want to maintain our status as members of that group. This is a large question that cannot concern us here, but let me simply say this: It is not the case that all Reformed theologians held to Scotus' view. Moreover, the issue of free will and moral responsibility requires a lot of extra-biblical theorizing. For example, neither the Bible nor the Confession mentions the phrase "synchronic contingency." In fact, the biblical data is underdetermining for most (all?) of the *models* of how freedom and responsibility fit with *RT*. As argued in section 3.1, this is largely a philosophical project. So in one sense, it matters little what a subset of Reformed Christians in fact believed, if one is concerned with what is true or what one should believe. The point here is that neither the Bible nor the Confession gives us Duns Scotus' views on human freedom, for they do not give us a worked out theory of *any* view of freedom and responsibility.

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it seems to me that if one denies a compatibilist reading of synchronic contingency, one must allow for libertarian free will.

Second, the above claim that Reformed theology was never deterministic is entangled in vagueness and ambiguity. The older Reformers were working with certain conceptions of fate and determinism that were narrow in scope. Thus, while *tokens* of determinism may not fit with Reformed theology that does not mean that the *type* does not fit. Here are examples of the vagueness and ambiguity. Does one simply want to avoid logical fatalism? Well one can on the model of determinism proposed above in section 3.3. Does one want to have a sense in which he could have done otherwise? Perhaps he can hold to classical compatibilism, or even semi-compatibilism's appeal to doing otherwise when presented with appropriate reasons. Does one want to avoid the idea that something outside God determines what we will do, such that our actions are *absolutely* necessary? Again, easily avoided on the understanding of determinism and God's decrees and providence given above. God could have decreed you eat grape-nuts; he does not, in all possible worlds, have to decree that you eat Lucky Charms. Since you could eat grape-nuts in some possible world with a different decree, this means that there is a sense you really could do otherwise, i.e., you have the potentiality in your nature to be able to eat one cereal or the other.

It seems to me that the need to deny determinism is simply based on misunderstandings of the term. As has been established above, determinism is a *hypothetical* necessity. At least, the kind I am arguing for is; and this understanding is pretty standard. However, notice that according to one advocate of the synchronic view, "The Reformed model of divine agency centers on the decisions of God. This should not be interpreted as theological determinism, since it implies only *hypothetical necessity* in its effects, which

themselves remain contingent.”<sup>62</sup> But this is not contrary to determinism, which states that *given* the determining conditions, *then* the determined event *must* happen. This is *not* to say that the event must happen necessarily *regardless* of any prior conditions. Does synchronic contingency demand a more robust contingency? Perhaps the idea that we *really* can do other than God decrees—not in any of the compatibilist or conditional senses above, but that we could really do any action we want *regardless of* God’s decree? That is: same decree, possible different futures. If not, then compatibilism must be affirmed. If so, then *RT* must be denied. But those who press this view seem to think determinism rules out ‘contingency.’ And the Reformed confessions affirm contingency, for example in chapter 5.2 of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* we read, “by the same providence, he ordereth them to fall out, according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.” So, it is argued, if we have contingency we cannot have determinism, and vice versa. Is this true? Let’s see.

### E.3.1 Contingency

#### E.3.1.1 Epistemic contingency

In historic Reformed theology, one sense of contingency or open futures is *epistemic*. That is, *we humans* don’t *know* the future, and so it *appears* contingent to *us*. But Reformers also thought God’s foreknowledge *shows* that the future is *in fact* settled, and thus that our actions are necessary (in a sense defined below). Thus, Pictet remarks that God’s complete knowledge of all events covers “not only those things which we call necessary, but also those things which we term contingent, and, which, although determined by God, *are really contingent in respect of us, seeing they arise from a concurrence unknown to us*

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<sup>62</sup> J. Martin Bac, *Perfect Will Theology: Divine Agency in Reformed Scholasticism as Against Suarez, Episcopius, Descartes, and Spinoza* (Brill Academic, 2010), p. 395, emphasis mine.

of several things together.”<sup>63</sup> Ridgley comments that God “knows all things future, namely, not only such as are the effects of necessary causes, where the effect is known in or by the cause, but such as contingent *with respect to us* [and which] therefore cannot be certainly foreknown by us.”<sup>64</sup> Muller summarizes: “God knows all that he has willed, whether it occurs by necessity, contingency, or the free acts of human beings. There is, therefore, a divine ‘foreknowledge’ of what, *from the human perspective*, are ‘future contingencies.’”<sup>65</sup> Thus God wills whatsoever comes to pass (determines it) but with respect to us things appear contingent (undetermined, fortuitous) in light of our ignorance. This epistemic contingency indexed to particular subjects’ minds is completely compatible with determinism.

In this vein, theologian Michael Horton mentions the contingency-due-to-ignorance but could be understood to take it a step further and apply the contingency to the mind-independent world. He quotes Calvin saying things similar to the Reformed theologians above. Horton then writes, “It is not just that they seem fortuitous; rather, *they are* fortuitous—but to us rather than to God.”<sup>66</sup> This is not clear. The “but to us” clause can’t be taken to mean “but to us” they *appear* fortuitous, for this would be superfluous and Horton seemingly denies this view. Thus, it seems he is saying that one and the same action or event is both fortuitous and not fortuitous. This is contradictory. It would be like saying one and the same flower is really a rose to us and a non-rose to God.

However, a non-contradictory reading could be given to this if we go back to

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: Volume III: The Divine Essence and Attributes* (Baker Academic, 2003), p. 402, emphasis mine.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. p. 403.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. pp. 402-403, emphasis mine.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. pp. 356-357, emphasis mine.



epistemic contingency. Perhaps Horton could define ‘fortuitous’ in terms of epistemic probability theory. On this analysis, that something is ‘chance’ is indexed to human knowers in terms of epistemic equiprobability. Since a human knower does not know for certain whether heads or tails will come up when a fair coin is tossed, the event is equiprobable relative to this knower. So, Horton could mean, “It is not just that they seem fortuitous; rather, *they are* [epistemically] fortuitous—but to us rather than to God.” And since it is quite compatible for an event to be epistemically probable to one knower and not another, the contradiction vanishes. Thus, there is an interpretation that can be given to how older Reformed theologians spoke that makes their claims about chance or fortune compatible with a determinist metaphysic.

I am not sure how to interpret Horton. That a determined action is *epistemically* fortuitous to some agent is completely compatible with determinism,<sup>67</sup> and if this is the only contingency desired for the Reformed view, why claim contingency is incompatible with determinism? It is clear to me, though, that non-determinist readers of Scotus go further than mere epistemic “chanciness.” They hold to ontological “chanciness.”<sup>68</sup> That is, our actions are not merely *epistemically* fortuitous but, as Horton says, “*they are* fortuitous.” On this score, these theologians move things past the epistemic limitations mentioned above and into ontological categories such as secondary causality. But does the contingency of secondary causes imply that determinism is false?

### E.3.1.2 Secondary causality

Another conception of contingency is spoken about in terms of secondary

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<sup>67</sup> Also see Tomis Kapitan, “Doxastic Freedom: A Compatibilist Alternative,” *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Jan., 1989), pp. 31-41.

<sup>68</sup> I don’t mean anything pejorative by “chanciness;” it is a euphemism for the open and unsettled nature of indeterminist actions.

causality. For example, in his recently published systematic theology by Michael Horton, he brings up the Reformed tradition of secondary causality. Initially, Horton seems to suggest that the Reformers were only objecting to certain *kinds* of determinism. For example, he says, the Reformed view “help[s] us to avoid the dangers of both hypersupernaturalistic fatalism and naturalism.”<sup>69</sup> It should be clear that on the definitions I have given above, determinism does not demand fatalism or naturalistic determinism. What I do is conditionally necessary on God’s decree, contingent on his decree. It is not naturalistically determined, and it does not occur *no matter what*.

Horton then goes on to make the point that secondary causation is real, and that divine and human agency “works simultaneously” in specific actions and events. This means, “one is the secondary or instrumental cause and the other is the primary or ultimate cause.”<sup>70</sup> But of course, determinism and compatibilism can allow for all of this.<sup>71</sup> (In fact, it sounds deterministic!) Determinism (and compatibilism) is *not* the thesis that only *one* cause operates in the world. That is monocausality. Determinism, as Robert Kane points out, “does not imply that we have no influence on how things turn out, including the molding of our characters. We obviously do have such an influence, and determinism alone does

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<sup>69</sup> Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Zondervan, 2011), p. 356. ‘Hypersupernaturalistic fatalism’ apparently refers to ‘occasionalism,’ p. 359. On occasionalism, see the SEP entry, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/occasionalism/>>.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> It is interesting to note here that the “works together” terminology is classic ‘synchronic contingency’ terminology, but then Horton applies to the human worker the role of “instrument,” which is how the determinist readings of Scotus are taken. See James Frank, “Duns Scotus on Autonomous Freedom and Divine Co-Causality,” in *Medieval Philosophy and Theology*. Vol 2. Ed. By Norman Kretzmann, et al. (University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), p. 160.

not rule it out.”<sup>72</sup> Indeed, on determinism, we are a vital part of the coming about of the determined end. So nothing about *determinism* rules out secondary causation.

Horton tells us that the primary and secondary causality is that of Aquinas, and that “the Reformers and their theological successors were satisfied in using this category and were even, for the most part, satisfied with the way it had been handled by Aquinas.”<sup>73</sup> But the story given by Beck, Vos, et al. is that *Duns Scotus* was the main inspiration for Reformed views on free will and contingency. However, it is well known that Scotus was largely reacting to Aquinas and they had different views on the will. Nevertheless, even if we grant Aquinas the position of font of Reformed thought, we should point out that, “more important, it is not at all clear that Aquinas affirms the incompatibility of freedom and causal determinism.” In fact, “everything Aquinas says in reaching these conclusions [on the nature of free will] is perfectly compatible with determinism.”<sup>74</sup> So, if the contingency of secondary causes the Reformers held to is Thomistic in nature, it is not clear that implies a contingency inconsistent with determinism. Moreover, it is very important to point out an often-muffled fact about secondary causality: God decrees our secondary causal actions too! If secondary causes for the Reformed tradition are, as Horton says, “instrumental causes” God uses in his “direction of all events to their appointed ends . . . for good because all things are decreed by his wise counsels,”<sup>75</sup> it is very hard to

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<sup>72</sup> Robert Kane, *Contemporary Introduction to Free Will* (Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 20.

<sup>73</sup> Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith* (Zondervan, 2011), p. 356.

<sup>74</sup> Thomas Williams, “Human Nature and Free Will” forthcoming in the *Oxford Handbook of Aquinas* (Oxford University Press), available online, <[http://shell.cas.usf.edu/~thomasw/Human%20freedom%20and%20agency%20\(Aquinas\).pdf](http://shell.cas.usf.edu/~thomasw/Human%20freedom%20and%20agency%20(Aquinas).pdf)>, last accessed 7/17/11.

<sup>75</sup> Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith* (Zondervan, 2011), pgs. 356–357.

avoid deterministic conclusions given this coupled with *RT*. Thus, the two main contingency desiderata needed for Reformed orthodoxy (epistemic contingency and secondary causes) are completely consistent with determinism.

### E.3.1.3 Whose contingency?

There are numerous kinds of contingency compatible with *RT* and determinism; the only kinds of contingency incompatible with the above would be libertarian kinds. So when Reformed theologians claim that Reformed theology is not deterministic because it affirms contingency, then they must have in mind the contingency libertarianism gives. That is, it must be that given *identical* past conditions, a human person could choose either X or not-X. It's simply not clear that this is compatible with *RT*. Moreover, this kind of contingency does not seem to be exactly what Scotus wanted to preserve. In *Lectura I*, 39 Scotus says, "the divine will, although it cannot have opposite acts (because his will is identical with its volition), yet wills in eternity a stone by one single volition and can will in eternity that there is not a stone or can not-will that there is a stone. So the divine will, as far as it is internally operation and so prior to its effect, can produce and not-produce an object" (*Lect. I.39.54*).<sup>76</sup> This is nothing more than the doctrine that God's decrees are free and that he could have decreed otherwise. But the Reformed theologians who argue for Scotus' view of contingency as the Reformed view want a contingency that allows a real possibility to do otherwise, to be able to will X at *t* and not-will X at *t*, and since these are identical times, it comes with the same prior decrees.<sup>77</sup> How can a

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<sup>76</sup> John Duns Scotus, *Contingency and Freedom. Lectura I, 39*, eds. A. Vos Jaczn., H. Veldhuis, A. H. Looman-Graaskamp, E. Dekker and N. W. den Bok (Springer 1994).

<sup>77</sup> A. J. Beck and A. Vos say precisely this in "Conceptual Patterns Related to Reformed Scholasticism," in *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* vl. 57 (2003), p. 28, where they affirm that "the entire history of the universe, up to the point of our choice, is consistent either with our performing that action or refraining from it."

Reformed theologian countenance this?

It is therefore dubious whether we can assign to the Reformed tradition an appropriation of Duns Scotus' views on contingency. Carl Trueman offers another perspective on the popularity of Scotus on the Reformers. Says Trueman:

For example, it has been argued with some passion by the Dutch scholar, Anton Vos, that Reformed theology is essentially Scotist in its metaphysics, but this approach seems to depend upon a narrow definition of Scotism which restricts it to a particular view of the nature of contingency, rather than the more obvious points of difference with Thomism . . . In fact, the appropriation of Scotus even by those Reformed theologians who emphatically denied Thomist intellectualism, was highly eclectic . . . my own view is that [Vos's] case for the absolutely fundamental importance of Scotism, almost to the exclusions of other options, needs to be balanced by other influences and issues.<sup>78</sup>

On top of this is, apart from Trueman's seeming concession to Vos's interpretation of Scotus as avoiding the "Scylla of determinism and the Charybdis of human autonomy,"<sup>79</sup> the argument that Scotus was actually a compatibilist, or the argument that he was simply inconsistent. But if Scotist contingency is of the libertarian sort, there is another worry.

### E.3.2 The foreknowledge argument

Troubles for this indeterminist view will arise when we ask about God's foreknowledge and try to stay consistent with the Reformed views on the matter.

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Amazing, since *God's decree* is part of this history! Our world comes attached with a specific decree, as it were, and not another.

<sup>78</sup> Carl Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Ashgate, 2007), pgs. 24 and 57. I should add here the Richard Muller is more in this vein, though he is an advocate of what I am calling Reformed libertarianism.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* 57.

Of all the arguments I could press against the view of Drs. Beck, Muller, and Vos, the foreknowledge argument will be particularly troubling (so would the consequence argument). The foreknowledge argument attaches what is known as *accidental necessity* to our actions. That is, given that some action or event has or is happening, it is now impossible that it did not happen (or isn't happening). Simply put, you cannot change the past.<sup>80</sup> So: (i) necessarily, yesterday God infallibly believes that you will do X today, and since (ii) God's infallible belief that you will do X today entails that you will do X today, then (iii) necessarily you will do X today. Some think this argument commits a fallacy in modal logic,<sup>81</sup> but this response doesn't take into account that accidental necessity is under discussion, not logical necessity. So, as logician Graham Priest recognizes, "This argument from [the accidental necessity of the past] does not commit the same fallacy [as the argument from logical fatalism]."<sup>82</sup> So, (i) transfers "accidental necessity" to

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<sup>80</sup> More precisely, J. M. Fischer defines accidental necessity thusly, "The term 'accidental necessity' (which derives from William of Ockham) refers to a kind of contingent temporal necessity. Things (propositions, states of affairs, and so forth) said to be accidentally necessary at a time are at that time 'fixed' or out of one's control to affect; if a true proposition p is accidentally necessary at a time t, then it is out of one's power at t (and after) so to act that p would not have been true." See Fischer, "Molinism," in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Jonathan Kvanvig, Volume 1 (Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 19.

<sup>81</sup> For example, Drs. A. J. Beck and A. Vos accuse Paul Helm of this, see "Conceptual Patterns Related to Reformed Scholasticism," in *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* vl. 57 (2003), p. 226. Likewise, Richard Muller accuses Jonathan Edwards of this fallacy in his lecture at TEDS titled, "Jonathan Edwards and the Absence of Free Choice: A Parting of Ways in the Reformed Tradition."

<sup>82</sup> Graham Priest, *Logic: A Brief Insight* (Sterling, 2010), p. 60. According to most proponents, (i) is a statement about God's past beliefs, beliefs that are now over and done with, and they therefore partake of the accidental necessity characteristic of the past in general. If the divine belief is considered timeless, then it seems even more apparent that they are in a fully realized realm over which we have no control. As Linda Zagzebski puts it, "If there is no use crying over spilt milk, there is no use in crying over timelessly spilt milk either" (Zagzebski, "Recent Work on Divine Foreknowledge and Free Will," in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will* (Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 52).

the conclusion.

Francis Turretin points out that there is a sense in which God's foreknowledge necessitates our actions. Perhaps more precisely, God's foreknowledge *shows* that our actions have a necessity attached to them (something like accidental necessity, not logical, recall). Turretin states,

Although men's actions may be free (because done spontaneously and by a previous judgment of reason), they do not cease to be necessary with respect to the divine decree and foreknowledge. Now the foreknowledge of God implies indeed the infallibility of futurity and of the event and the necessity of consequence, and yet does not imply coercion or violence, nor take away from the will its intrinsic liberty.<sup>83</sup>

Paul Helm makes a similar point when he says, "The argument is this: if there is something in the past that entails something in the future and if what is past is necessary—accidentally or historically necessary—then what is entailed is similarly accidentally or historically necessary."<sup>84</sup> Since God's infallible belief that Bob will eat Lucky Charms entails Bob will eat Lucky Charms, and since God's belief is a fact about the past having accidental necessity, then the necessity transfers to what is entailed by God's belief; namely, necessarily Bob will eat Lucky Charms. According to Reformed theologians, necessitation is not contrary to free will. Richard Muller points out that "necessity and freedom are neither contraries nor contradictories: the contrary of necessity is impossibility; the contrary of freedom is coercion."<sup>85</sup> So again, it is unclear on what grounds the

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<sup>83</sup> Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (P&R, 1992), III.12.24, p. 211.

<sup>84</sup> Paul Helm, "The Augustinian-Calvinist View," in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (IVP Academic, 2001), p. 185.

<sup>85</sup> Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Divine Essence and Attributes* (Baker Academic, 2003), volume III, p. 434, fn. 360. N.B. Here, Muller seems to treat the Reformed view of freedom as classical compatibilist. No

deterministic nature of *RT* is made.

In response, some claim that it is only necessitation by causal determinism that rules out freedom. That is, the laws of physics plus the propositions about our past history entail that we will do what we do. This is sometimes called nomological determinism. Libertarian David Widerker issues a challenge to those who think only nomological determinism, and not necessitation by other factors, such as God's foreknowledge, rule out libertarian freedom:

Examining now the previous examples from this point of view, it is not at all clear to me that they describe situations in which Jones can be said to be acting on his own. Since in them God is assumed to be infallible, the fact *D(B)* occurs at *T* is entailed (in the broadly logical sense) by the prior act of God's believing at *T'* that *D(B)* occurs at *T* (*T'*) is metaphysically necessitated or metaphysically determined by the belief of God. Now, if a libertarian rejects as an instance of an agent's acting on his own a scenario in which an agent's decision is nomically necessitated by a temporally prior fact (or a conjunction of such facts), why wouldn't he reject the one in which the decision is *metaphysically necessitated* by a prior event? What, in my opinion, is crucial to the libertarian's conception of free decision is that such a decision is not necessitated or determined in any way by any antecedent fact. . . . Now, one may object that metaphysical necessitation is not *nomical* necessitation. But why should this difference be relevant? If a decision is rendered unfree by the fact that its occurrence at *T* is entailed by the conjunction of some temporally prior facts together with the laws of nature, then why would it not be rendered unfree if its occurring at *T* is entailed by God's prior belief that it will occur at *T*? If the critic still thinks

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libertarian would claim no coercion equals freedom, and especially not concerning freedom of the *will*.



that there is a difference between the two cases, it is incumbent upon him to explain why.<sup>86</sup>

Thus foreknowledge seems to be quite the threat to libertarian freedom. By responding that *RT* does not imply a specific type of determinism, like nomological determinism, this does not entail that Reformed theology still isn't a kind of determinism. If one thinks otherwise, what is the answer to Widerker?

More generally, apart from Widerker, how will a Reformed theologian answer the foreknowledge argument? How can it be that, given God's knowledge that Penny will eat pizza today at noon, Penny actually has the power to do otherwise? What *Reformed* answer can be given? Will middle knowledge be appealed to?<sup>87</sup> Ockhamism?<sup>88</sup> Simple foreknowledge?<sup>89</sup> These views do not allow that God's foreknowledge of what happens is based on his decree and ultimately grounded in him.<sup>90</sup> To say, as Scotus does, that God does know only based on his will gets him involved in determinism and seems to make his view inconsistent.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> David Widerker, "Responsibility and Frankfurt Examples," in *Oxford Handbook of Freewill* (Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 328, emphasis original.

<sup>87</sup> Inconsistent with WCF 3.2, also see Travis Campbell, "Middle Knowledge: A Reformed Critique," *Westminster Theological Journal* 68 (2006): 1–22.

<sup>88</sup> David Widerker, "Troubles With Ockhamism," *The Journal of Philosophy*, v. 87, 9 (Sept. 1990).

<sup>89</sup> Inconsistent with WCF 3.2, also see William Hasker, "Why Simple Foreknowledge is Still Useless (In Spite of Dave Hunt and Alexander Pruss)," *JETS* 52/3 (September 2009) 537–44.

<sup>90</sup> On Molinism, we have something we might call the transfer of groundlessness principle. For God's free knowledge is grounded in part in his middle knowledge, the latter of which has no grounds, and certainly is not grounded in God. So God's knowledge is in part grounded in the groundless.

<sup>91</sup> See William Lane Craig, *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Contingents from Aristotle to Suarez* (Brill Academic, 1997, ch. 5); and Christopher Kosciuk, *Human Freedom, in a World Full of Providence: An Ockhamist Molinist Account of the Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Free Will* (U Mass-Amherst, diss. 2010). As to the inconsistency, see e.g., Marilyn McCord Adams in *William Ockham: Predestination, God's Foreknowledge, and Future Contingents* (Appleton, Century, Crofts, 1969), p. 50; and Anthony Kenny, who claims the view

As Christopher Kosciuk notes,

[G]iven this view of things, I think Scotus must conclude that the relationship of essentially ordered co-causality between the human will and the divine will in producing a particular human volition is of the second, participative kind, that of instrumental cause to first cause. In other words, God must be seen as causing the very act of causality by which the human will produces its volition. The problem with this solution is that it renders impossible the libertarian view of human freedom.<sup>92</sup>

We saw libertarians rejecting this view as inconsistent with ultimate sourcehood in section 3. And since God is co-causing things in accord with his unchangeable purposes for all things, it is hard to see how we get alternative possibilities either. One resort might be to appeal to the Boethian solution, but that will be subject to the traditional responses.<sup>93</sup> An unchangeable timeless knowledge that Penny will eat pizza tomorrow seems just as troublesome for Penny's ability to avoid this action.

Regarding Scotus's saving of contingency, Douglas Langston writes,

According to Scotus, not only must God directly will the existence of the actions of agents who are not free, but he must also directly will the actions of free agents . . . God determines what acts of free agents are actual, and these actions are contingent because God could will other actions than those he in fact wills. Nevertheless, these actions would not seem to be free since no free agent can act otherwise than as God wills.

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gets "incomprehensible," *Medieval Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 245.

<sup>92</sup> Christopher Kosciuk, *Human Freedom, in a World Full of Providence: An Ockhamist Molinist Account of the Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Free Will*, (U Mass-Amherst, diss. 2010), p. 137.

<sup>93</sup> For example, see David Widerker, "A problem for the Eternity Solution," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Volume 29, Number 2 / April, 1991.

Apparently, Scotus' analysis of omniscience rescues contingency, but it does so at the expense of the freedom of free agents—particularly human beings.<sup>94</sup>

But Langston claims that Scotus is really a compatibilist, and so these consequences wouldn't be troubling to him. Thus, Langston says that the appeal to Scotus doesn't get the middle way between compatibilism and incompatibilism that Drs. Beck, Muller, and Vos seem to want. If they dig in their heels and insist that Scotus gives us live possibilities and all the other libertarian trappings that seem inherent in his view, then their view is just inconsistent with Reformed views of God's decree, providence, and foreknowledge.

However, it appears an answer may not be forthcoming. While, on the libertarian reading of Scotus, he surely proclaimed *that* God's foreknowledge was compatible with incompatibilistic human freedom, he didn't offer an analysis of *how*. Before proceeding let me make a terminological adjustment. The foreknowledge debate brings about some ironic shifts in the terminology used in this paper so far. Those who think that foreknowledge is not a threat to libertarian free will are called compatibilists, while those who think such knowledge is a threat to libertarian freedom are called incompatibilist. The Reformed have traditionally been in the latter camp yet also compatibilists about free will and moral responsibility with determinism.

Regarding a Scotist answer to the foreknowledge argument, James Frank remarks, "Scotus does not attempt any such explanations. He seems content to leave in silence what must have appeared to him the mystery of God's inner life." For Scotus "it seems to have sufficed to have established the mere fact" of the

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<sup>94</sup> Douglas Langston, *God's willing knowledge: The influence of Scotus' Analysis of Omniscience* (The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986), p. 24.

consistency between “God’s omniscience . . . and the creatures’ indeterminist freedom of the will.”<sup>95</sup> However, the foreknowledge argument is meant to show any alleged compatibility is impossible. Scotus never takes the Bible and demonstrates by exegesis his particular view of the metaphysics of human freedom. If he had, perhaps he could deflect the foreknowledge defeater by an appeal to the authority of God’s word. But all we have at this point is Scotus’ argument *that* indeterminist human freedom is compatible with God’s foreknowledge and the foreknowledge argument that attempts to show *that* it is not. Without an explanation of how the two can be compatible it seems to simply ignore the argument and moves us no closer to resolution. Scotus has his argument *that* the two are compatible, I have my argument *that* they are not, and *why* they cannot be.

#### E.4 The Upshot

Here’s the upshot regarding this appeal to synchronic contingency: if the contingency is only a human epistemic one, then that fits with determinism and compatibilism. If the contingency needed is that of secondary causality, that fits with determinism too—so long as the secondary cause cannot do otherwise given the same prior conditions, and so long as the secondary cause is not the ultimate source or originator of its actions. If the contingency needed is supposed to be logical, that fits with determinism too (determinism *simpliciter*, not *logical* determinism). This has been the point of the Augustinian-Calvinist-Reformed perspective. Paul Helm states that “[the Augustinian-Calvinist-Reformed] hold that the divine decree by which all things come to pass is logically contingent.

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<sup>95</sup> James Frank, “Duns Scotus on Autonomous Freedom and Divine Co-Causality,” in *Medieval Philosophy and Theology*. Vol 2. Ed. Norman Kretzmann, et al. (University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), p. 164.

God might have decreed otherwise.”<sup>96</sup> If the contingency desired is physical contingency, then that fits with certain types of determinism too. If it is desired that our actions not be *absolutely* necessary, that fits with determinism too. Determinism can allow for a sense of “ability to do otherwise” too. So if that is what is desired, and one wants to buy into classical compatibilism, this fits with determinism too. What does synchronic contingency give the Reformed view, then? I suggest: nothing, at least if the Reformed view wishes to maintain RT as its distinctives.

I understand that the above theologians desire to distance themselves and the Reformed tradition from Edwards. That’s fine; my purpose here is not to argue for any specific model of determinism or compatibilism, or for Edwards. But here is the point that’s been made throughout the paper: Reformed theology is deterministic and since it maintains man is morally responsible for his actions it will require one type of compatibilism or other. But, the Reformed perimeters are expansive enough to allow freedom in working out what model one thinks best explains or describes this kind of determinism and compatibilism. So while one may reject Edwards, one may not reject determinism and compatibilism *simpliciter*. Just because Edwards’s *model* doesn’t work (assume for the sake of argument), this doesn’t mean the *project* of compatibilism doesn’t work. Edwards was a compatibilist. Compatibilism isn’t Edwards. Lastly, I understand the desire to get God “off the hook” for evil (which is another motivation for this Reformed non-determinism, I suspect). But since the Reformers who hold this Scotist view also hold to something like hard determinism in matters of salvation, and that is arguably what is most offensive about Reformed theology to those outside the tradition, then God is still on the hook.

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<sup>96</sup> Paul Helm, “An Augustinian-Calvinist Response,” in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (IVP Academic, 2001), p. 157.

## 6. Objections to Libertarian Free will

Reformed Christians can appeal to several kinds of arguments in objecting to libertarian freedom. Reformed Christians do not need to accept the cogency of each of these arguments, and Reformed theology does not demand that all of them be good arguments, but they do show that rejection of libertarianism rests on more than just some preferred theological system. There are serious theological and philosophical objections to libertarianism. There are also serious empirical objections. I do not mean the following to function as an exhaustive look at these objections to libertarian free will, but only to serve as a very minor introduction to them.

### 6.1 Theological arguments

Reformed Christians can appeal to their confessional interpretation of certain biblical doctrines that, if correct, rule out libertarian free will. There are also several proof texts that make libertarianism hard to square with. However, these verses may only rule out libertarianism with respect to salvation and not everyday mundane choosings. Other passages would seem to speak to everyday mundane choosings (e.g., an inductive argument from various mundane events and actions said to be decreed or caused by God; also Ephesians 1:11; on this, see Feinberg's exegesis in *No One Like Him*). We would also want to know how God could bring about an inspired and inerrant Bible if all the writers wrote with libertarian free will. Moreover, Reformed thinkers may claim that the libertarian's notions of 'love' and 'moral responsibility' are not the Bible's, and so while they claim that their view is motivated by the Bible's, it's really an imposition of more modern, Western, sentimental notions of those things.

## 6.2 Empirical arguments

Libertarianism is held hostage to the findings of science. While it may be that quantum indeterminism has made more unlikely the idea of determinism by the laws of physics, this indeterminism only functions at the quantum level and not the macro level (at least as far as we can tell).<sup>97</sup> So you could have nomological determinism at the macro level. However, there are other things that might determine, and science does seem to be moving in a more deterministic direction in these areas. These areas would be the fields of biology, sociology, psychology, economics, the environment, and often a conjunction of all five. It is very hard for some to see how we do not have our wills and characters already set and formed by our upbringing, which includes all the above various factors coming into play. These character-forming events take place very early in our lives, far earlier than our consciously choosing to set our wills and form our own character in a way that is truly ultimately “up to us.” Nevertheless, these kinds of arguments are subject to the ever-changing winds of research, and no knockdown argument should be sought from them.

## 6.3 Frankfurt-style counter examples

I presented a ‘Frankfurt-style counter example’ above. These can be used to show that ability to do otherwise is not required for moral responsibility. As I indicated, there is a lot of literature devoted to this topic, but here is one response to Frankfurt counter examples. It is claimed that the counter examples beg the question because on indeterminism, no controller could know in advance what a libertarian free person was going to do. It is “unsettled” up to the

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<sup>97</sup> However, Dr. John Byl via email correspondence (7/24/11) points out that some argue quantum indeterminism at the micro level could affect things at the macro level, see, John C. Beckman, “Quantum Mechanics, Chaos Physics and the Open View of God,” *Philosophia Christi* 4 #1: 2002, 203-213.

moment of choice. So how could the controller “predict” ahead of time what was going to happen? This is referred to as the Kane-Widerker objection or Indeterminist Worlds objection. There have been many philosophical responses to this, but one theological counter is that it looks like this objection assumes Open Theism, for if God were the controller he would know what the person will do if he allows it, and Christians might think that too high a price to pay to avoid Frankfurt’s counters.

#### 6.4 The arbitrariness objection

Determinists might wonder why a libertarian free person goes one way rather than another. Why does Bob choose Jesus while Fred doesn’t? It can’t be that one is smarter or more moral than the other, for that would lead to boasting and remove grace from salvation. Salvation is now for the smart and upright. So what explains it? The response from libertarians is that Bob chose for reasons. This doesn’t quite get at things though. For on libertarianism, while reasons may incline, they do not do so deterministically or decisively. On libertarianism, given *identical pasts*, a person may choose differently. This means, given *identical* desires, character, and reasons up to the moment of choice, the person can choose differently. This seems radical. If the exact same past, desires, character, reasons, etc., *always* issued in identical futures, then it looks like we have a case of determinism on our hands. So what “tips the balance?” Libertarians typically have said this is mysterious. This shouldn’t be considered a knockdown argument against libertarianism, for there is definitely mystery in the Reformed system too.

#### 6.5 The luck objection

A nastier version of the above argument rears its head in what is sometimes referred to as **the luck objection**. This argument has spawned quite a lot of literature, and I can hardly do it justice here. Again, since libertarianism is the



thesis that the identical pasts could yield different futures, then when Bob<sub>1</sub> chooses to help a stranded motorist there is a possible world with an identical past to ours and Bob<sub>2</sub> chooses to stay inside his car where it is warm and *Bon Jovi* is playing. Since *everything* up to the decision is *identical*, then it must be a matter of luck that “explains” why Bob<sub>1</sub> went one way and Bob<sub>2</sub> went another way. But if that is what ultimately explains why we do one thing over another, how can we be free or held morally accountable for actions which are the result of luck? The issue for many is that the indeterminism involved in libertarian freedom actually *hinders* free will. It makes things appear random, arbitrary, out of our control. There are many different versions of this argument; this was a rather unsophisticated one. But I trust it gives the reader a taste for how these objections operate.

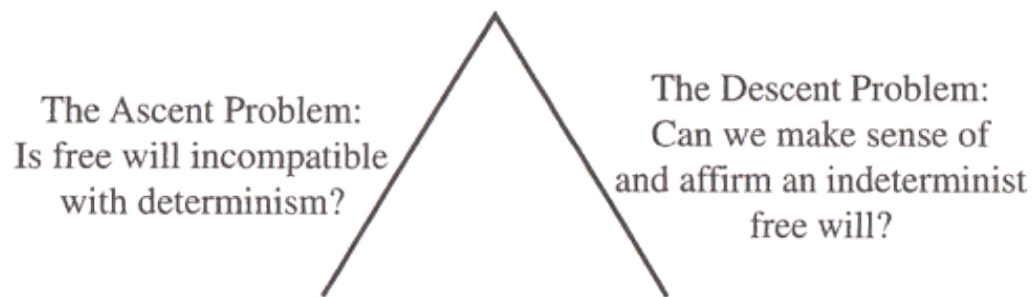
## 6.6 The foreknowledge argument

This argument takes the premise that God is omniscient with respect to the future choices humans will make and concludes that humans could not do other than they do. This obviously rules out what we referred to as ‘wide source incompatibilism,’ and that looks like the best form of libertarianism; so if it goes, libertarianism goes. The argument here looks remarkably similar to the ‘consequence argument’ that was given above. Simply put: If God infallibly believed yesterday that I would have a tuna sandwich today, and God’s beliefs entail that I will have a tuna sandwich today, then I cannot do otherwise than have a tuna sandwich today. As with the other arguments, this was put in an extremely simple form, but it was discussed more thoroughly above in section E.3.2. And, as with the other arguments, this argument has generated a lot of literature. Both libertarians and compatibilists give this argument. Some libertarians believe that in the nature of the case, God could not know, in

advance, what a person with libertarian freedom will do. In theological circles, this position is known as Open Theism. But other libertarians, like philosopher Dave Hunt, agree with this argument, and he is no Open Theist; he is, however, a narrow source incompatibilist.

## 6.7 Incompatibilist Mountain and the Libertarian Dilemma

The above objections represents what libertarian Robert Kane has referred to as “Incompatibilist Mountain and the Libertarian Dilemma.” He represents it with this picture.<sup>98</sup>



The Reformed exegesis and teachings, and compatibilist positions, claim the ascent has been achieved; moreover, objections 6.1 and 6.2 argue that determinism in fact obtains. Objections 6.3 – 6.6 show that the descent is tortuous, that *indeterminism* actually threatens free will. Thus, it is not as if Reformed Christians must always be on the defensive by seeking to show that free will and moral responsibility are compatible with God’s determining decrees. Moreover, Reformed Christians who opt for libertarianism (or something near enough) must answer the ascent and descent objections. So, Reformed Christians may go on the offensive and argue positively that libertarian free will is false and also does not allow for free will or moral responsibility.

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<sup>98</sup> Robert Kane, *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will* (Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 34.

## 7. Closing Remarks

It was my aim that this paper would give my fellow Reformed Christians a good introduction to the topic of free will and moral responsibility. I hope to have made clear that Reformed theology is a kind of determinism, and that there are some confessional statements that serve as a perimeter fence which protect us from going too far but also allow a wide range of movement inside the fence. The Reformed doctrines that get us determinism are taken from statements on God's decree, God's providence, and God's knowledge. The information we have in our Reformed confessions is enough to give us some general rules to go by, but it does not present to us a robust and worked-out *model* of compatibilism. Thus, Reformed believers have freedom to develop or latch on to their own favored models, two of which I presented in this paper.<sup>99</sup>

I also presented the view of freedom held by the majority of Christians today, especially in academia. I sought to provide a brief introduction to this view, which we called 'libertarianism', and I also briefly presented a few arguments Reformed Christians could bring to bear against this view. I also interacted with a view I called "Reformed libertarianism (or something near enough)." This view is gaining in popularity but was seen to be subject to vagueness, ambiguity, and philosophical-theological objections. It wasn't clear that the motivations for this view gave us anything that theological determinism could not provide.

I did not attempt to prove determinism in this paper, or that there was a

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<sup>99</sup> Michael McKenna offers several more in the article "Compatibilism" written for the SEP, see <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/compatibilism/>>, last accessed 7/18/11.

knockdown argument for compatibilism. Neither did I seek to provide sophisticated and worked-out knockdown arguments against libertarianism. Again, my aim was to orientate mainly lay Reformed Christians to this discussion, even perhaps academic theologians who are lay philosophers. I did so in a very introductory way but trust I was fair, and I hope the reader now has a good grasp on some of the main and important issues in this topic and so is prepared for further self-study if that should so be your desire.

Lastly, I hope to provoke interest and self-awareness among Reformed Christians. The issues covered here are the main reasons non-Reformed find Reformed theology objectionable. *RT* has prompted many to malign our God and refer to him as a moral monster, or worse, the devil. Hopefully this paper will help Reformed Christians to move the discussions forward with their neighbors, co-workers, or colleagues. However, this paper was more informatory than critical. I do hope, though, to have corrected several misconceptions about Reformed theology.<sup>†</sup>

*Soli Deo Gloria!*

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<sup>†</sup> I would like to thank several people for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper: James Anderson, Brett Barkley, Dan Chapa, Ron Di Giacomo, James Gibson, David Houston, Jonathan King, Breanne Manata, Ruben Settegren, and Greg Welty. Any errors that remain are my own.

## Further Reading

\* = Introductory.

### Online

“Compatibilism” (SEP) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/compatibilism/>

“Free Will” (SEP) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/freewill/>

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Campbell, Joseph. *Free Will*. Polity, 2011.

\*Kane, Robert. *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will*. Oxford University Press, 2005.

\*Fischer, Kane, Pereboom, and Vargas. *Four Views on Free Will*. Blackwell, 2007.

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Fischer, John Martin and Mark Ravizza. *Responsibility and Control: A Theory of Moral Responsibility*, Cambridge 1998.

Watson, Gary. *Agency and Answerability: Selected Essays*. Oxford University Press, 2004.

### Moral Responsibility and PAP

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Mele, Alfred. *Free Will and Luck*. Oxford University Press, 2006.

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\*Beilby, James and Paul Eddy eds. *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*. IVP, 2001.

Hasker, William. *God, Time, and Knowledge*. Cornell University Press, 1989.

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Feinberg, John. *No One Like Him*. Crossway, 2001.

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