

A detailed oil painting of John Calvin, showing him from the chest up. He has a full, dark beard and mustache, and is wearing a dark cap and a dark robe with a white collar. He is looking slightly to the right of the viewer. The background is a light blue wall with a dark grid pattern.

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Calvin at the Centre

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Calvin at the Centre



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To Alec Clark

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Preface

Most of the material published here is new. However, parts of Chapters 1 and 10 were given as the 2005 Byron I. Bitar Memorial Lecture at Geneva College, and as the 2008 John Murray Lecture at the Highland Theological College.

Published material that has been used in various forms for some of the chapters is as follows:

‘John Calvin and the Hiddenness of God’, in Bruce L. McCormack (ed.), *Engaging the Doctrine of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker/Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2008). (Chapter 4)

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‘Classical Calvinist Doctrine of God’, in Bruce A. Ware (ed.), *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God: 4 Views* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 2008). (Chapter 5)

‘Westminster and Protestant Scholasticism’, in Ligon Duncan (ed.), *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century*, ii (Fearn: Mentor, 2004). (Chapter 5)

‘John Calvin, the “Two Issues” and the Structure of the *Institutes*’, *Calvin Theological Journal*, (November 2005). (Chapter 5)

‘Word and Spirit in Conversion’, in David F. Wright (ed.), *Spirit of Truth and Power* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2007). (Chapter 7)

Among the many people from whom I have learned and received various kinds of help I especially wish to mention Jon Balsarak, Alec Clark, Ron Gleason, Tony Lane, Richard Muller, Mark Talbot, David VanDrunen, and Robert White. In addition, Stephen Williams acted as one of the readers for the Press and made numerous helpful suggestions. Aza Goudriaan was of particular assistance with Chapter 2 and also with advice on sources

concerning the impact of Cartesianism on the Dutch Reformed community. I thank them all. For so expertly transforming a text into a book i'm grateful to Tom Perridge, Lizzie Robottom, Carol Bestley, and especially Jane Wheare. Without Oliver Crisp's meticulous reading of an earlier draft of the material the book would have been greatly inferior to the one you hold, and without his striking portrait of Calvin which adorns the jacket it would have been much less presentable in another sense. So particular thanks to him.

This is the fourth book that I have written with the word 'Calvin' in its title. I reckon that it will be the last. I imagine that Angela and Alice, who have provided support to me and shown great patience, will not be sorry to learn this.

*Vancouver
British Columbia*

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Si fallor, sum
Augustine, *City of God*

Si appetunt, ergo sunt
Calvin, *Psychopannychia*

Cogito, ergo sum
Descartes, *Meditations*

Introduction

THIS book develops further the approach to Calvin's thought taken in *John Calvin's Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). There I attempted to demonstrate that though superficially different in the way that they were presented, Calvin's ideas owe a significant debt to ancient and medieval thought, and that he consciously employed various philosophical concepts and doctrines, even when treating them eclectically. In approaching him in this way I was consciously situating him in the flow of western ideas, classical, medieval, and modern, while not forgetting, indeed while stressing, that at least in terms of Calvin's own convictions, the tap root of his thought is undeniably biblical.

In the present work I attempt to develop this approach in at least two ways. Though I return to some of the topics dealt with in the first book, I here extend their range. Here there is, for example, material on predestination, on the work of Christ, on Cartesianism, on compatibilism, on post-mortem existence, on the atonement, and on the main overarching theme of the *Institutes*, unaccountably omitted from *John Calvin's Ideas*: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.

But the range is different in another sense, in that in the treatment of each topic an attempt is made to link Calvin's thought not only by antecedent but also by consequent; not only finding sources but also heirs. Calvin is 'at the centre' not in a cosmic sense but simply as an expression of my intention to consider both ideas that influenced him, and how they influenced him, and ideas of others which are in some sense a consequence of Calvin's ideas and so linked to them. Calvin's successors held certain ideas in the same kind of connection as he did, even if they did not consider them in his way. So Calvin tends to be at the centre of each particular chapter as well.

In using the word 'heirs' I must be careful not to give the impression that this book is in any sense offered as a contribution to the history of ideas in the conventional sense. If Jonathan Edwards, or John Arrowsmith, appropriated the ideas of John Calvin, let it be so. If there is simply coincidence between him and such as them, let that also be so. My interest is not in establishing and plotting the course of any direct influence, but in

displaying intellectual connection, coincidence, and overlap, or rather the mixture of coincidence and change, leaving to others the task of showing exactly what Calvin's literary sources were, and how he used them, and precisely how he was used as a source by others, if indeed he was. So, for example, it is sufficient that even if Calvin did not read Anselm much, his ideas on the atonement are undoubtedly Anselmic. It is enough for my purpose that Calvin's version of determinism is markedly similar to that of some Stoics. I do not rashly conclude from this fact that he took down Stoic ideas verbatim, any more than I attempt to detect whether the influence was that of earlier or later Stoicism. After all, even a footnote reference to a Stoic, and there are some of these in Calvin, is not indisputable evidence of influence. But I am content with the milder conclusion, that he was undeniably influenced by those who had taken things from the Stoics. What is of much more interest to me is the place of Stoic-like ideas themselves that lie at the heart of his anthropology. What engages me, and I hope will engage my readers, is the fact of coincidence and influence rather than the tracing of the thread through the labyrinth, though sometimes we will look at those who have, or who have believed they have, consciously adopted and shaped an idea of Calvin's. Here, to be sure, the causal connection is sometimes obvious. But even at such points it is the use (or abuse) of the ideas that is uppermost. Since this book consciously builds on the previous one I make no bones about referring back to it from time to time.

Perhaps I should here make clearer than I did in *John Calvin's Ideas* what is my attitude to Calvin and medieval influence, for this book provides more of the same. In that book I suggested Aquinas as a template for the pattern of some of Calvin's ideas—ideas about God, and about natural law, for example—because it is pretty certain that someone apprised Calvin of, say, the distinction between God *in se* and God *quoad nos*, and Aquinas may have been his source, or one of them. There is no evidence against that, except the bare fact that Calvin scarcely ever cited him. Did someone else influence him on the same point? Was the point obvious to Calvin from his own intellectual environment, a bit of theological common sense, in an era that was after all much more theologically charged than is ours? If the answer to either or both of these questions were to be proved affirmative, then each is compatible with the thesis that the influence could have been Aquinas, but was not, and strengthens the more general claim that Calvin is not a context-free, purely biblical theologian, receiving intellectual manna immediately from heaven, but had a heritage of later medieval ideas. But the case of Calvin and Scotus is different, for here the influence of Scotus on Calvin has been claimed by a

number of scholars. Yet there is no more reason to think that he was a diligent student of Scotus than he was of Thomas.

Though they are linked by a common approach, and sometimes linked thematically, the various topics of the chapters that follow are not intended to offer a general thesis about who or what influenced Calvin, or who or what he influenced. There are no general lessons to be drawn, for the law of unintended consequences rules in the matter of a person's intellectual position and influence, as in other matters. The chapters are organized by topic, and are placed in a sequence that owes more to philosophy than theology, but they are relatively independent of each other. I hope nevertheless that the series of chapters may succeed in presenting a cumulative case for thinking that there is a significant intellectual centre which John Calvin occupies.

As in the earlier book I have done my best to articulate Calvin's ideas, and those of his conversation partners. By this I mean that, to begin with, I have put his words on my pages, rather than being satisfied with a footnote reference to them. But, further, I have tried to make best sense of them by critical reflection and, where necessary, a modest amount of rational reconstruction. In these ways I have tried to persuade Calvin to speak to us afresh.

The Knowledge of God and of Ourselves

APPROPRIATELY enough, we will begin by considering the significance of the opening sentences of the *Institutes*, and particularly the first two sentences: ‘Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But as these are connected together by many ties, it is not easy to determine which of the two precedes and gives birth to the other.’¹ Words like these appeared at the head of every edition.² The theme is explicitly revisited in the next chapter, and at the beginning of book II. But I will argue that in fact the theme is to be found throughout much of the *Institutes*, and in particular in what Calvin has to say about the life of faith.

In this chapter I hope to do three interrelated things. The first, obviously enough, is to try to understand what Calvin means by the knowledge of God and of ourselves, and about true wisdom. Then we will endeavour to trace the sources of his way of putting things. Recently Stephen Menn has made a strong case for a definite Augustinian theme in the philosophy of René Descartes, even claiming that Descartes’s philosophical project was inspired by Augustine, although of course different from his.³ So, third, we will look at Descartes through what we have learnt from Calvin and Augustine. There are certain striking differences between Augustine and Descartes, as well as similarities—perhaps more differences than Menn recognizes. I am not of course suggesting that *Calvin* was in any sense a direct influence, or any kind of influence, on Descartes. The

¹ *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh, 1845; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1966) (hereafter *Inst.*), I.1.1. This translation is used throughout.

² The 1536 edition, the first, has: ‘Nearly the whole of sacred doctrine consists in these two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves’ (*Institution of the Christian Religion*, trans. F. L. Battles (Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox, 1975), 20).

³ *Descartes and Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

comparison is prefatory to considering the influence of Descartes on Reformed Orthodoxy, in Chapter 2.

In that chapter we will use our discussion of the three figures, Augustine, Calvin, and Descartes, to raise what I believe is an interesting question. It is a fact that the majority of theologians in Reformed Orthodoxy were scholastic in their method, and heavily influenced by Aristotle, though also somewhat eclectically inclined. Yet it is also a fact that some Reformed theologians came to adopt some of the philosophical outlook of Descartes. Our question will be: Could the philosophy of Descartes have become the dominant philosophy of the Reformed Churches as they developed after Calvin? What was there about Cartesianism to prevent this?

KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM

When Calvin says, at the head of the *Institutes*, that almost all the true and solid wisdom that we possess consists in the knowledge of God and of ourselves, it is well to note certain features of what he states, as well as what he is not saying. First, we note the emphasis on wisdom. Acquiring the knowledge of God and of ourselves offers the method of possessing true and sound wisdom. Here Calvin taps into one medieval emphasis, religion as *sapientia*, and he implicitly rejects another, that theology chiefly has to do with theoretical understanding and certainty, *scientia*. In this sense Calvin is a Franciscan rather than a Dominican. Theology does not provide us with more knowledge in the form of more explanations, as nuclear physics and history and criminal detection do, but with wisdom. It has to do with the *knowledge* (*notitia*) of God, certainly, but religion is not a matter simply of acquiring enough knowledge of the right kind. Nonetheless religion has a clear cognitive basis in beliefs about God and ourselves expressible in propositional form. The knowledge of God is not, say, simply a matter of adopting a set of rules, moral rules or rules for spiritual exercises. Further, the knowledge that true religion requires should lead us to enjoy the favour and presence of God, and to bring us to our everlasting home. It is an exaggeration to say that for Calvin the knowledge of God is mere know-how, but there is nevertheless more than a germ of truth in this. Here is one place at least where the affinity of Calvin's thought is more with John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* than it is with Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*.

If we wish to keep to the spirit of Calvin here then we need to be wary of the word 'theology' in connection with Calvin's thought. Calvin rarely uses that word. When he does use it, it is often as a term of contempt. For Calvin, the 'theologians' are the speculative thinkers, especially the

Sorbonnistes of his own day who attempt to distract attention from and to disrupt the progress of the Reformation in France by their own 'blasphemous inventions' (as Calvin frequently dubbed them) about God. Calvin's characteristic term was not *theologia* (a word which, after all, was the invention of Aristotle) but *religio*, which bespeaks the binding of the self to God. For Calvin, true religion has to do, intrinsically, with the knowledge of God and of ourselves in relationship with God.

Where did Calvin get the idea of this kind of knowledge of God from? Where did the emphasis that this wisdom is to be found in the knowledge of God and of ourselves arise? One obvious suggestion is that he simply took it from Scripture, from its depiction of Christ as the wisdom of God, from its warnings against the wisdom of this world, from the 'wisdom literature', for example from the eighth chapter of Proverbs, and especially from the Psalms. Perhaps this is the correct suggestion. But there are other possibilities, too, not incompatible with this. The idea that wisdom consists in self-knowledge was of course a prevalent philosophical theme in antiquity. But suppose we ask: From where does the emphasis on the twofold knowledge, of God and of ourselves, *in this particular formulation*, emerge? I suggest that it was one of the very many things that Calvin learned from Augustine. The supreme importance for Augustine of this twofold knowledge, of God and of ourselves, is found vividly, for example, in the *Confessions*. The whole work is prefaced by a meditation on the interrelation between the two. And in his wonderful discussion of memory in book X he says, addressing the Lord, 'to hear you speaking about oneself is to know oneself' and 'what I know of myself I know because you grant me light'.⁴ The fundamental point is stated with deliberate plainness and rather more formality in the *Soliloquies*: 'God and the soul, that is what I desire to know. Nothing more? Nothing whatever.'⁵ Calvin was acquainted with both works.

Calvin's doctrine of God as he has revealed himself (as contrasted with God 'in himself'), around which he orientates the entire *Institutes*, is integral to its opening words, and (less obviously) to the treatment of the nature of faith, and the life of faith, particularly in book III, which clearly reflects this 'God and ourselves' relationship, as we will see later on. Although Calvin may get the idea of the interrelatedness of the knowledge of God and of ourselves from Augustine, I will presently suggest that

⁴ *Augustine's Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), X.3.3, X.5.7.

⁵ *Soliloquies*, trans. Charles C. Starbuck, I.7, in *The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1971), I.

he gives the relation between the two his own distinctive twist. But, in any case, he did not quite say what Augustine said, did he? He did not add Augustine's 'nothing more', and there is much evidence in the *Institutes* and elsewhere that there were other things that Calvin desired to know, and other sources of wisdom than the twin sources, the self in its relation to God and God in his relation to the self, could provide.

It is significant that he's very careful to state that such knowledge of God and of ourselves 'almost entirely comprises the wisdom we possess'—*almost* all, but not quite all. What other possible sources are there? There is the power and wisdom of God in creation which, Calvin thinks, everyone acknowledges to some degree. Calvin himself was particularly fascinated and impressed by astronomy. He sees in astronomy, as he rhapsodizes about the heavenly bodies, evidences of God's wisdom, and so—we may suppose—astronomy is one avenue, albeit a secondary and subordinate avenue, to the wisdom of God. And the Reformer's robust sense of the legitimacy and worthwhileness of secular callings, and their implications, also helps us to appreciate the significance of that 'almost'.

A complicating factor is that Calvin's understanding of the source of true wisdom is for him a bridge between two kinds of knowledge of God, *duplex cognitio dei*, which is also a significant theme in Calvin, and one that placed its stamp on subsequent theological discussions in early Reformed orthodoxy.⁶ For, according to Calvin, 'Since then, the Lord first appears, as well in the creation of the world as in the general doctrine of Scripture, simply as a Creator, and afterwards as a Redeemer in Christ—a twofold knowledge of him hence arises.'⁷ The knowledge of God the Creator is distinct from the knowledge of God the redeemer. Yet wisdom is to be had from each kind of knowledge, though the hub of such wisdom, Calvin thinks, is in our knowledge of God the Redeemer. God's general revelation yields evidence of his wisdom in creation, but more especially, for Calvin, heavenly wisdom is gained from his revelation in Christ.

As I have said, in bringing together the knowledge of God and of ourselves Calvin imparts his own distinctive twist. This is easy to overlook. The contemporary Reformed theologian John R. Franke opens his book *The Character of Theology*⁸ by quoting the words of Calvin from the beginning of the *Institutes*. And then he says:

⁶ Richard A Muller, "Duplex Cognitio Dei" in the Theology of Early Reformed Orthodoxy, *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 10/2 (1979), 51–61.

⁷ *Inst.* I.2.1.

⁸ (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2005).

Calvin's observation continues to provide a helpful model for reflecting on the character of theology and suggests that we must always be attentive not only to the knowledge of God but also to the knowledge of ourselves as human beings if we hope to practice an approach to theology that leads to wisdom. . . . This suggests that in the discipline of theology we must take account of the particular social and intellectual settings in which we engage in theological reflection and exploration.⁹

But this is a radical misunderstanding of what Calvin is saying, which is not that when we do theology (which concerns the knowledge of God) we are to be aware of the social and cultural setting in which we, as human beings, are placed (the knowledge of ourselves). This is a point almost too obvious to be worth noting. After all, the opening words of book I of the *Institutes* are preceded by an elaborate apologia for the Reformation addressed to King Francis I of France. When it comes to being a contextual theologian (which all theologians are now urged to become) John Calvin was certainly no tyro. In any case, in sixteenth-century Geneva Calvin could hardly have been unaware of his cultural setting.

Unfortunately, Franke has missed Calvin's distinctive twist, even though he quotes the very words that express it. Calvin's emphasis is that the knowledge of God and of ourselves are *immediately reciprocal*. In knowing God we at once gain true knowledge of ourselves, and in knowing ourselves we are at once led to know God. There is no choice in the matter. It is not that there are two distinct subject matters, God, and ourselves, which (Calvin counsels) it is wise to bring into some kind of positive relationship. Rather, the knowledge of the one inevitably leads to the knowledge of the other; the knowledge of the other leads inevitably to the knowledge of the first.

As we see how Calvin works this out in the first few paragraphs of the *Institutes* we need to bear in mind that in the first instance at least the *Institutes* is addressed to Christian people. It is not a work of apologetics, except in the sense that it is indirectly an apologia for the Reformation, nor is it a textbook of theology, even though Calvin occasionally uses that word of it. In the crisis of the Reformation Calvin is attempting to set forth the character of the Christian religion to those who already confess Christ. It is a manual for ministers and lay leaders, but one that bears the marks of the particular struggles of the Reformation. So what does he tell them?

He tells them that the knowledge of God and of ourselves are 'connected together by many ties', but that it is hard to tell which precedes and causes the other. If, without self-deception, we look on ourselves then we

⁹ Franke, *Theology*, 14.

immediately turn our thoughts to the contemplation of God. For our 'endowment' is clearly not of our own creation. Furthermore, our awareness of our 'miserable ruin' 'compels us to turn our eyes upward'. 'Thus, our feeling of ignorance, vanity, want, weakness, in short, depravity and corruption, reminds us that in the Lord, and none but he, dwell the true light of wisdom, solid virtue, exuberant goodness.' So we cannot honestly seek the knowledge of God without being aware of ourselves. Everyone 'is not only urged to seek God, but is also led as by the hand to find him.'¹⁰ The knowledge of ourselves leads to God.

Similarly, the knowledge of God leads us to a knowledge of ourselves. 'Man never attains to a true self-knowledge until he have previously contemplated the face of God, and come down after such contemplation to look into himself.' Our innate pride is such that unless we look to the Lord, the sole standard of righteousness, we will not be convinced 'of our injustice, vileness, folly, and impurity.'¹¹ So the knowledge in question is spiritual or religious knowledge: the knowledge of oneself in relation to God.

Suppose that you reckon you're a pretty good cricketer. But then you meet Freddy Flintoff. Chatting to this hero, you may still think that you are pretty good. Then you have a nets session with Freddy. Afterwards, you may still think you are pretty good, and hope that Freddy might pick you for his team. But that would be self-deception. What you ought to think, once Freddy begins to manifest his bowling and batting skills, is that you *are* mediocre. If you are free of self-deception, that's what you will think; in fact, you will become immediately aware of this fact. The knowledge of Flintoff's abilities and of your own is reciprocal. In knowing the one you know the other. Perhaps that's the only way, or the only type of way, that you are going to come to a true estimate of your cricketing skills, or your lack of them.

Calvin thinks that the knowledge of God and of ourselves has that kind of structure. You may be aware that God exists, but this is not sufficient for true self-knowledge. It's simply like knowing that there is a talented cricketer called Freddy Flintoff. God must manifest himself (as Freddy did in the nets), and he has graciously condescended to do this, the record of which is in Scripture. Here is the 'face of God' which Calvin says we may look upon, revealed to us. Once you become convinced that this is who God is, what he is like, and what he has done, then you will begin to form a true estimate of yourself. However, according to Calvin, true Augustinian that he was, this realization is not an inference that we are naturally

¹⁰ *Inst.* I.1.2.

¹¹ *Inst.* I.1.2.

inclined to draw, but one which we resist drawing. Who wants to know of his own failure, weakness, and need? We naturally hide such from ourselves. We will draw such an inference only when we are in some sense imbued with God's Holy Spirit. Such self-awareness is thus not 'natural' but 'spiritual.'

So the knowledge of God and of ourselves is reciprocal. The two are intertwined, as Calvin puts it. But while we increase in self-knowledge as, imbued by the Spirit, we recognize who God is and what he has done, there is no parallel increase in God's knowledge of himself. How could that possibly be?

As we've already noted, Calvin's entire discussion of this theme presupposes something which we will not directly address here, but which needs to be kept in mind. Fundamental to Calvin's treatment of God in the *Institutes* and, I would argue, throughout the large corpus of his other writings, is the distinction he draws between God as he is in himself, and God as he is revealed to us. I believe that he took this distinction from Thomas Aquinas, though there is little direct evidence of this; but, at least, he could have taken it from the climate of late medieval thought in which he was educated. From wherever exactly he got the idea it perfectly served his purpose.

It is clear from what we have seen already that for Calvin the knowledge of God is not the knowledge of something that does not affect us, that we can take or leave as we see fit. This is the 'frigidity' of the scholastics which repels him. Calvin believes that some philosophers, particularly Plato, saw a necessary connection between the true knowledge of God and an appropriate affective response to him:

This did not escape the observation even of philosophers. For it is the very thing which Plato meant when he taught, as he often does, that the chief good of the soul consists in resemblance to God; i.e. when, by means of knowing him, she is wholly transformed into him¹²

Here is another case where the knowledge of God affects the state of the knower by a kind of immediate reflex. Plato's account of the connection of true knowledge to the affections is in sharp contrast to that knowledge

¹² *Inst.* I.3.3. See, for example, Plato, *Theaetetus*, ed. Myles Burnyeat, trans. M. J. Levett, rev. Myles Burnyeat (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1990), 176. See also *Comm.* 1 John 2: 3: 'Plato, though groping in darkness, yet denied that "the beautiful" which he imagined, could be known, without filling man with the admiration of itself; so he says in his *Phaedrus* and other places. How then is it possible for thee to know God, and to be moved with no feeling?' (compare *Comm.* Pet. 2: 3). All references to Calvin's *Commentaries* are to the Calvin Translation Society translations (see Bibliography).

which, as Calvin puts it, merely ‘flits in the brain.’ In fact, for this reason Calvin can scarcely bring himself to call this knowledge.

So Calvin invites us, as part of a Christian confession, to think of God ‘operationally’, or functionally. For this is how God has revealed himself to us in Scripture. This does not mean that Calvin is a reductionist or pragmatist in his religion, for how God has revealed himself, his ‘nature’, according to Calvin, is a fitting expression of his essence which is incomprehensible to us—we cannot fully grasp it—because we cannot know God as God knows himself. Yet it would be badly wrong to think of Calvin as a theological agnostic. God has revealed something of himself; but he has not done so to satisfy our curiosity, he has not revealed the whole of his will, and he most certainly has not revealed himself as he knows himself—this is not revealed and is not revealable. At one point Calvin interjects, ‘how very minute a portion of divine wisdom is given to us in the present life.’¹³ True relations with God are based on knowledge—not exhaustive knowledge, but limited information given to us for a purpose. This approach of Calvin’s to our knowledge of God is reinforced by what he says about the way in which God accommodates himself to us. Part of God’s self-manifestation is through ‘lispering’ to us as a nurse talks to her children. God adapts himself to our time-bound and space-bound circumstances, both in the language that he uses of himself, and supremely by taking unfallen human nature in Christ. The knowledge that he gives is real knowledge, but because this calls for a human response it is adapted to our creaturely circumstances.

So when we are inclined to ask ‘What if?’ questions about God, to attempt to peer into his secrets, to offer accounts and explanations of the divine mysteries, then we are moving in a decidedly un-Calvinian direction—though, it must be said, Calvin himself occasionally, perhaps without realizing it, is drawn by controversy into a little speculation on his own account. More importantly, it is the knowledge of this God, the God as he is toward us, that gives us the knowledge of ourselves, and so makes us wise.

This motif, the knowledge of God and of ourselves, set out in the first few chapters of the *Institutes*, recurs in chapter 15 of book I, as well as on the opening page of book II, and elsewhere. Calvin tells us that the trouble is not with the ancient precept ‘know thyself’ but with the philosophers who think that it is a recommendation for us to discover what fine people we are. We are, by nature, inclined to admire ourselves. But (once more) this is not true knowledge, but self-deceit. To start with, nothing we have is

¹³ *Inst.* III.2.20.

our own, however excellent, but it is the gift of God himself. But, second, we must recognize that in 'our miserable condition since Adam's fall, all confidence and boasting are overthrown, we blush for shame, and feel truly humble.'¹⁴

So the knowledge that we are to seek is not that which flatters, in which we are credulous about the superiority of our gifts:

Hence, independent of any countenance from without, general credit is given to the very foolish idea, that man is perfectly sufficient of himself for all the purposes of a good and happy life . . . Accordingly, in every age, he who is most forward in extolling the excellence of human nature, is received with the loudest applause . . . Whosoever, therefore, gives heed to those teachers, who merely employ us in contemplating our good qualities, so far from making progress in self-knowledge, will be plunged into the most pernicious ignorance.¹⁵

Calvin is not denying that we have good traits, gifts of God. God would not have us forget our 'primeval dignity'; nevertheless there is nothing about us that should cause us pride.¹⁶

HOW OUGHT WE TO PROCEED?

Hence, in considering the knowledge which man ought to have of himself, it seems proper to divide it thus, first, to consider the end for which he was created, and the qualities—by no means contemptible qualities—with which he was endued, thus urging him to meditate on divine worship and the future life; and, secondly, to consider his faculties, or rather want of faculties—a want which, when perceived, will annihilate all his confidence, and cover him with confusion. The tendency of the former view is to teach him what his duty is, of the latter, to make him aware how far he is able to perform it.¹⁷

This is at the basis of Calvin's understanding of our plight. We have duties to God that we presently cannot fulfil. The 'ought' of the law does not imply the 'can' of the ability to fulfil the commands of the law, but instead shows us our need. If the knowledge that we have of God is to be functional, then the knowledge we are to look for from God is not (or not merely) theoretical knowledge about which we might express indifference, taking or leaving it as we see fit.

Calvin begins his discussion of faith in book III in a way that echoes the reciprocal relation between the knowledge of God and of ourselves that we have been discussing:

¹⁴ *Inst.* II.1.1.

¹⁵ *Inst.* II.1.2.

¹⁶ *Inst.* II.1.3.

¹⁷ *Inst.* II.1.3.

That since God by his Law prescribes what we ought to do, failure in any one respect subjects us to the dreadful judgment of eternal death, which it denounces. Secondly, Because it is not only difficult, but altogether beyond our strength and ability, to fulfil the demands of the Law, if we look only to ourselves and consider what is due to our merits, no ground of hope remains, but we lie forsaken of God under eternal death.¹⁸

As a consequence of the resulting impasse a person may be driven to seek relief in God's free grace. Someone who realizes his plight will be forced to seek a resolution of it, and be drawn to the work of the Redeemer who merits God's grace on the behalf of sinners with no merit of their own. Not surprisingly, then, it is in his long discussion of faith (in book III) that Calvin offers a rich development of the theme of the twofold knowledge. This discussion is a continuation of his treatment (in book I) of the recognition of the authority of Holy Scripture—a basic aspect of faith for Calvin, in its fundamental stance of trusting the word of God, and especially the promises of God.

According to Calvin, by God's grace our Spirit-given knowledge of our own weakness immediately causes us to reflect on God as he is manifested to us. This is the path of true wisdom. Such reflection in turn produces penitence and faith. In believing, we come to know ourselves as, objectively speaking, we are. We begin to be freed of self-deception and illusion. Such knowledge arises from possessing a true estimate of our need. For Calvin, Christian faith is always faith in the word of God, supremely faith in the God-man. To the extent that we understand our own believing, its ups and down, the sources of its health and strength, the dangers that are associated with it, the tendency to despair and the tendency to presume, to that extent we know ourselves as believers, and so know ourselves as we really are.

Calvin's definition of faith is well known:

We shall now have a full definition of faith if we say that it is a firm and sure knowledge [*firmam certamque cognitionem*] of the divine favour toward us, founded on the truth of a free promise in Christ, and revealed to our minds, and sealed on our hearts, by the Holy Spirit.¹⁹

¹⁸ *Inst.* III.2.1.

¹⁹ *Inst.* III.2.7. It is worth pointing out that definitions play a pivotal role in the 1559 *Institutes*. Calvin offers, *inter alia*, definitions of the image of God in man (I.15.4), the soul and its faculties (I.15.6), free will (II.2.12), natural law (II.2.22), repentance (III.3.5), justification (III.11.11), conscience (III.9.15), the Church (IV.2.3), tradition (IV.10.16), and a sacrament (IV.14.1).

This is part of Calvin's sustained polemic against faith as mere assent. Faith involves assent, because it has propositional content, but it goes beyond assent, involving trust, reliance upon God's promise, and hence reliance upon God. This celebrated definition controls the subsequent discussion, but strangely that definition has often been celebrated without noting the character of the setting in which Calvin develops it.

The definition is the conclusion of the process of refinement that Calvin conducts—a sustained set of reflections on our understanding of the firm faith by which we embrace God's mercy in Christ.²⁰ Such faith is not a mere opinion or even persuasion. It is not implicit faith, faith in what we haven't a clue about, believing the teaching of the Church whatever that may turn out to be. Rather, faith relies on knowledge, propositional knowledge, 'not of God merely, but of the divine will', an 'explicit recognition of the divine goodness, in which our righteousness consists.'²¹ However, there is an aspect of genuine faith that must remain implicit because we cannot comprehend everything that we are given. For example, we encounter obscure passages of Scripture, and we have to wrestle with their meaning. Implicit faith can also be a preparation for faith, as it was with the first of Christ's disciples—and an expression of their teachableness. So within explicit faith are implicit elements which we also believe but which we do not yet understand.

However, faith in its full, explicit sense rests upon God's word. By this we gain a true knowledge of Christ:

First, we must remember, that there is an inseparable relation between faith and the word, and that these can no more be disconnected from each other than rays of light from the sun . . . The same word is the basis on which it rests and is sustained. Declining from it, it falls. Take away the word, therefore, and no faith will remain.²²

So faith is knowledge, the knowledge of God made known to us through his word. One more element remains to be put in place, as Calvin painstakingly refines his definition, moving 'from the general to the particular.'²³

It is not that faith has regard to the word of God in general. If our trembling conscience were to see only signs of God's indignation and wrath in his word, we would shun him, not seek him. So what more is needed? A recognition of God's benevolence, of his goodness to us:

²⁰ *Inst.* III.2.1.

²¹ *Inst.* III.2.2.

²² *Inst.* III.2.6.

²³ *Inst.* III.2.6.

In this way, doubtless, we make a nearer approach to the nature of faith. For we are allured to seek God when told that our safety is treasured up in him; and we are confirmed in this when he declares that he studies and takes an interest in our welfare. Hence there is need of the gracious promise, in which he testifies that he is a propitious Father; since there is no other way in which we can approach to him, the promise being the only thing on which the heart of man can recline.²⁴

So not the word of God in general, not even a declared ‘promise’ of God in general, since a ‘promise’ may in fact be a threat; rather, faith appropriates the promise of good. And so we arrive at the celebrated definition, the relevant elements underlined:

We shall now have a full definition of faith if we say that it is a firm and sure knowledge of the divine favour toward us, founded on the truth of a free promise in Christ, and revealed to our minds, and sealed on our hearts, by the Holy Spirit.²⁵

Note the structure of Calvin’s discussion here, the way in which he establishes necessary and sufficient conditions of faith. The process of paring down to an acceptable definition involves a strong appeal to elements of self-knowledge, to the beliefs that a would-be believer has about himself. Such self-knowledge is revealed to us by God’s words, first of law and then of promise, as our minds are illuminated by his Spirit.

Many have seen in this definition the idea that faith, and the assurance of faith, the assurance that I am indeed a believer, are for Calvin essentially connected.²⁶ The propositional content of faith, and the propositional content of the assurance of faith, must clearly be different, and yet they could be inseparably connected. It has frequently been claimed that for Calvin they are inseparably connected. Such a reading of Calvin is natural if attention is paid only to the focal point of his discussion of faith, to the definition itself, and not to how he arrives at it, and what follows it.

For Calvin in effect (though not explicitly) denies that if a person believes that he has faith in Christ then he has faith in Christ, on the grounds that his belief may be presumptuous and not well grounded. Likewise, he denies the truth of a second conditional: If a person believes/has faith in Christ, then he believes that he believes/has faith in Christ. He denies this on the grounds that believing/having faith in Christ may be

²⁴ *Inst.* III.2.7.

²⁵ *Inst.* III.2.7.

²⁶ On this reading of Calvin see, for example, R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), and subsequent discussion for example, Paul Helm, *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982) and especially Richard Muller, *After Calvin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

accompanied by doubts. What is the evidence that despite his definition Calvin recognizes this? It begins at his announced search for a 'clearer definition of faith.'²⁷

The definition is not, then, Calvin's first word on the subject, and it would be a big mistake to think that it was Calvin's last word either. It soon becomes clear that this is in fact a definition of an ideal, of what faith ought to be like, of what at its best it is, not of faith as it is routinely possessed. It is a persuasive rather than a reportive definition.

For we must note what Calvin goes on to say immediately after giving his definition. For example, he claims that there can be temporary faith, as in the case of Simon Magus, people who taste the word, giving an assent to it that does not penetrate to the heart. 'The human heart has so many recesses for vanity, so many lurking places for falsehood, is so shrouded by fraud and hypocrisy, that it often deceives itself.'²⁸ 'Meanwhile, believers are taught to examine themselves carefully and humbly, lest carnal security creep in and take the place of assurance of faith.'²⁹ We must note that for Calvin the assurance of faith is not the automatic accompaniment of faith, or part of faith itself, but it must often be fought for, preserved against doubts and fears, and distinguished from false confidence.

So it is not surprising that Calvin takes great pains to distinguish true faith from its counterfeits. On the one hand he stresses faith's certainty, yet before providing his definition of faith he says that it is surrounded by error and unbelief, and after giving the definition he goes on to say that even weak faith is real faith. It may be mixed with elements of doubt, and it may be unstable, but it does not rest there, but strives with God's help to become assured faith.

At the other extreme Calvin says that there are those who artificially constrain God's mercy, and so receive no consolation in believing. 'The idea they entertain is, that this mercy is great and abundant, is shed upon many, is offered and ready to be bestowed upon all; but that it is uncertain whether it will reach to them individually, or rather whether they can reach to it.'³⁰ True faith renders the conscience calm and peaceful before God's judgement. 'Without which it is necessarily vexed and almost torn with tumultuous dread, unless when it happens to slumber for a moment, forgetful both of God and of itself.'³¹ Note once more the explicit inter-linking between the knowledge of God and the knowledge of self. Calvin even speaks of the possibility of temporary faith, of faith that may even

²⁷ *Inst.* III.2.1.

²⁸ *Inst.* III.2.10.

²⁹ *Inst.* III.2.11.

³⁰ *Inst.* III.2.15.

³¹ *Inst.* III.2.16.

bear some fruit, and yet does not endure to the end. All these convictions about the nature of faith are grounded in evidence about the character of the interplay between the knowledge of God, revealed in his word, and the knowledge of ourselves, weak and wounded as we are.³²

It has frequently been claimed that there is a great gulf fixed between Calvin and those who later called themselves Calvinists, the ‘precisionists’ of the Netherlands, the Puritans of old and New England, and of course the Covenanters of Scotland. There are indeed many differences between Calvin and the Calvinists, though not so many as we are sometimes told that there are. Here, in Calvin’s remarks on faith, we can see a strong link, the link of ‘experimental religion’, as it was once quaintly called, between Calvin and Samuel Rutherford, or Calvin and William Perkins, or Calvin and Thomas Shepherd. What all these have in common is this: the conviction that if we are to know ourselves then we must be aware of our capacity for hypocrisy and self-deception, of the wonderful ability of our minds to manufacture idols, of our willingness to satisfy ourselves with false comfort, and, at the other extreme, the danger of despair. We come to realize all this as we come to know God: it is part of the awakening and enlightening activity of his Spirit. So, testing ourselves—hence the later phrase ‘experimental religion’—involving self-examination is a normal, intrinsic part of the life of faith. We must know ourselves, but this knowledge is not gained unaidedly, by ourselves, nor does it rest in our capacity to speculate, peering into the secrets of God, or contemplating God as he is in himself, but as he is revealed in Christ:

But if we are elected in him, we cannot find the certainty of our election in ourselves; and not even in God the Father, if we look at him apart from the Son. Christ, then, is the mirror in which we ought, and in which, without deception, we may contemplate our election. For since it is into his body that the Father has decreed to ingraft those whom from eternity he wished to be his, that he may regard as sons all whom he acknowledges to be his members, if we are in communion with Christ, we have proof sufficiently clear and strong that we are written in the Book of Life.³³

We will consider the theme of Christ as the mirror of election more fully in Chapter 4.

³² There is much more material showing the detail of Calvin’s teaching on faith which presupposes the believer’s self knowledge: temptation, conflict, delightfulness of grace for the cast down, self examination (*Inst.* III.2.24–40). See also references to knowledge of God and of ourselves at III.11.1, III.12.2–5, III.13.1.

³³ *Inst.* III.24.5.

So, is assurance an essential feature of faith, according to Calvin? A quick glance at the definition may lead us to conclude that the answer must be ‘yes’, for ‘a firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence toward us’ is a part of it. But this is the ideal. We have seen that a person’s faith may be less than this ideal and nonetheless be true faith—mixed with doubts at one end of the spectrum, with presumption at the other.³⁴

Yet there are contexts, particularly those in which Calvin is seeking to draw a sharp contrast between what he portrays as the confident, almost exuberant character of Christian faith according to the Reformation and the unassured faith that the Church of Rome sought to inculcate, in which almost his entire emphasis falls on faith as assured faith. On such occasions he stresses this aspect of Christian faith almost to the exclusion of these other features arising from self-knowledge that he deals with in book III of the *Institutes*.

So in his discussion of faith in his ‘Antidote’ to the *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* (published in 1547) Calvin makes a strong, though even here not an essential, connection between faith and assurance:

In the *tenth* chapter, they inveigh against what they call The Vain Confidence of Heretics. This consists, according to their definition, in our holding it as certain that our sins are forgiven, and resting in this certainty. But if such certainty makes heretics, where will be the happiness which David extols? (Psalm xxxii) Nay, where will be the peace of which Paul discourses in the fifth chapter to the Romans, if we rest in anything but the good-will of God? How, moreover, have we God propitious, but just because he enters not into judgment with us? They acknowledge that sins are never forgiven for Christ’s sake, except freely, but leaving it in suspense to whom and when they are forgiven, they rob all consciences of calm placid confidence.³⁵

Even here Calvin finds place for the possible separation of faith and assurance. ‘On the whole, then, we see that what the venerable Fathers call rash and damnable presumption, is nothing but that holy confidence in our adoption revealed unto us by Christ, to which God everywhere encourages his people.’³⁶ God encourages his people to have holy confidence in their adoption, but they are nonetheless his people if though in fact they believe, they are not confident that they do so. Similarly with his comment on Canon XV of the sixth session of the Council:

³⁴ For a fuller discussion of Calvin on the assurance of faith see Joel R. Beeke, *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism and the Dutch Second Reformation* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1991), ch. 4.

³⁵ *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, ed. Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet, 7 vols. (Edinburgh, 1844, Philadelphia, 1858; repr. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1983), iii. 125.

³⁶ *Selected Works*, iii. 136.

For he [Paul] wishes the Ephesians to know and be assured that they have been made partakers of heavenly grace in Christ, as they have been chosen in him before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1.4). Thus therefore it becomes all believers to be assured of their election, that they may learn to behold it in Christ as in a mirror.³⁷

AUGUSTINE'S ASCENT

So far we have looked at what Calvin has to say about the knowledge of God and of ourselves. We noted at the beginning that he is indebted to Augustine for this connection and for some of the ways in which he expresses it. We will now consider Augustine himself, chiefly though not exclusively in the *Confessions*, and in the light of expository remarks made about him by Stephen Menn.³⁸ We will make an explicit comparison between Augustine and Calvin, his disciple. This will begin to prepare us to consider the intellectual relationship between Calvin and another disciple of Augustine, René Descartes.

The *Confessions* often takes the form of a meditation in the presence of God. We will note the character of some of this, and how prominent the interrelationship of the knowledge of God and of ourselves is in it. Then we will consider two further elements in the picture: the influence of the 'books of the Platonists' on Augustine and how he learned from them to 'ascend' (in his mind) to God; and what Augustine believed this ascent to be.

We need to look no further than the opening pages of the work to be confronted with our theme, the well-known words 'you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you':³⁹

Look where he is—wherever there is a taste of truth. He is very close to the heart; but the heart has wandered from him. 'Return, sinners, to your heart' (Isa. 46:8 LXX), and adhere to him who made you. Stand with him and you will stand fast. Rest in him and you will be at rest. Where are you going to along rough paths? What is the goal of your journey?⁴⁰

Augustine's search for the true knowledge of God is of course affected by the influence of Manichaeism on him, as in this passage:

For I did not know [at that time] that the soul needs to be enlightened by light from outside itself, so that it can participate in truth, because it is not itself the

³⁷ *Selected Works*, iii. 155.

³⁸ *Descartes and Augustine*.

³⁹ *Confessions*, I.1.

⁴⁰ *Confessions*, IV.12.18.

nature of truth. You will light my lamp, O Lord. My God you will lighten my darkness (Ps. 17: 29), and of your fullness we have all received (John 1: 16). You are the true light who illuminates every man coming into this world (John 1: 9), because in you there is no change nor shadow caused by turning (Jas. 1: 17).⁴¹

So far there is little to separate Augustine from John Calvin, though even in such passages there are differences, of course. Intertwined with Augustine's remarks about the knowledge of God and the self are numerous comments in which he struggles with Manichaeism, as he was being gradually delivered from it. In the course of these struggles he develops his 'grammar' of God, of how to talk of this pure, simple Spirit who exists timelessly and spacelessly and who is our Creator. But by Calvin's time this grammar had been largely assimilated by the theology of the Church, and Calvin took it over: divine simplicity, divine eternity, omnipresence, and so forth, and how to talk of these.

But there is a further, striking and influential, element in Augustine's quest to know God: his providential encounter with the books of the Platonists and how he learned from them to 'ascend' (in his mind) to God. Previous to this, reading Cicero awakened in him a hunger for wisdom, and reading Aristotle showed him the impossibility of categorizing God in terms appropriate to the creation:

What help was this to me when the book was also an obstacle? Thinking that absolutely everything that exists is comprehended under the ten categories, I tried to conceive you also, my God, wonderfully simple and immutable, as if you too were a subject of which magnitude and beauty are attributes. I thought them to be in you as if in a subject, as in the case of a physical body, whereas you yourself are your own magnitude and your own beauty.⁴²

But with the books of the Platonists, and with God's help through them, things were different:

With you as my guide I entered into my innermost citadel, and was given power to do so because you had become my helper (Ps. 29: 11). I entered and with my soul's eye, such as it was, saw above that same eye of my soul the immutable light higher than my mind—not the light of every day, obvious to anyone, nor a larger version of the same kind which would, as it were, have given out a much brighter

⁴¹ *Confessions*, IV.15.25. There are many other such passages, connecting the knowledge of God with other states, such as happiness and the knowledge of sin (e.g. X.2.2, VIII.7.16, X.1.1. X.5.7).

⁴² *Confessions*, IV.16.29. Compare with this Augustine's remarks on the uselessness of Aristotle's categories, VII.5.7.

light and filled everything with its magnitude. It was not that light, but a different thing, utterly different from all our kinds of light. It transcended my mind, not in the way that oil floats on water, nor as heaven is above earth. It was superior because it made me, and I was inferior because I was made by it.⁴³

There is no doubt that the reading of these books, and the way in which they inspired or at least facilitated Augustine's 'ascent' to God, is a high point in the narrative of Augustine's *Confessions*. It emphasizes an element in Augustine's understanding of the knowledge of God and of ourselves that is not present, in that form, in Calvin.

As Stephen Menn tells us, in book VII of the *Confessions* Augustine gives us a 'valuable and powerful report' of the enormous influence that the books of the Platonists had on him.⁴⁴ It is likely that these books were by Plotinus and perhaps Porphyry, and were brought to Augustine (by the providence of God, he tells us) by someone whom he does not name, but who was possibly Manlius Theodorus, a pagan Neoplatonist.⁴⁵ What exactly was their influence? We may try to answer this question by noting first how they did not influence Augustine.

As we can see from the quotation from book IV just considered, the effect of these books on Augustine and his ensuing experience did not provide him with a concept of God, for he already had that, or at least he had the rudiments of such a concept.⁴⁶ As we have seen, his narrative is littered with references to being in the presence of God.⁴⁷ Of course some of these references may be to Augustine's standpoint at the time of writing, but not all of them can be. For the 'books of the Platonists' episode comes in the middle of affirmations about the faith he adhered to despite fluctuations, and in the course of his intense search for the origin of evil, as is clear from the first few pages of book VII. So the books' influence must partly be understood in the light of what Augustine himself brought to that episode.

The books provided him with two things. First, a technique for thinking, a 'strategy of thought', as Menn calls it,⁴⁸ about God by which he was hoping to supplant the idea, bequeathed to him by the Manichees, that God was to be thought of in sensuous imagery. For such imagery actually reflected the character of the Manichaean God, who was shaped, located, and the like. But granted that God is pure spirit, immutable and eternal, as the Church taught, and as (he believed) Scripture revealed, how could *this*

⁴³ *Confessions*, VII.10.16.

⁴⁴ Menn 80.

⁴⁵ *Confessions*, VII.9.13 n. 13.

⁴⁶ *Confessions*, VII.3.4.

⁴⁷ *Confessions*, VII.7.11.

⁴⁸ Menn 80 1.

God be thought, and thought about?⁴⁹ And how can this God be known? The Platonist ‘technique’ of the ascent of the mind to God provided an answer, or part of an answer, to that question.

Second, the ascent afforded him an inner certainty that God existed. After that, he was in no doubt that this God, the God of the Christian Church and not the God of the Manichees, was the true and living God. So the ascent has both a conceptual and an epistemological aspect for Augustine. This technique involved a non-sensuous route, learned from the books, of ‘ascending’ to God through the mind. Stephen Menn seems to think that this was the occasion for Augustine coming to know God, and develops the thesis (to which we will return) that in the *Meditations* and elsewhere Descartes follows this method—knowing God and the soul—in the development of his scientific epistemology. Menn’s thesis is initially persuasive, and he has certainly drawn to our attention significant parallels between Descartes and Augustine, and so has redrawn part of the map of the beginnings of modern philosophy. But his way of describing what happened to Augustine, and then comparing this with the passages in book VII, is worth thinking further about.

Menn’s dominant noun for describing what happened to Augustine in adopting the Plotinian discipline of ascent of the soul to God is *vision*, though sometimes the word is placed in inverted commas.⁵⁰ Menn thinks that following Plotinus Augustine claimed to see God for a moment, to have a vision of God, though not a mystical vision. He says:

What allowed Augustine to resolve the question ‘whence evil’ was an intellectual ‘vision’ purporting to manifest God’s true nature; and, although Augustine later decided that this vision was not sufficient to give him the desired wisdom, he never doubted that it was a genuine vision of God. Although this vision might not be sufficient for wisdom, it was certainly a positive step toward wisdom, and it gave Augustine a description (which he was never to renounce) of what the intellectual content of the desired wisdom would have to be. It is reasonable to describe Augustine’s reading of the Platonists, and his consequent vision of God, as a stage in Augustine’s conversion.⁵¹

In this way Augustine was able to come to the vision of God he had been striving for, and to escape the condition of ignorance of God he had shared with the Manichees. The ‘description’ of God, a rather misleading word in this context, nevertheless aided him in developing a new grammar of God. Further, and most significantly, given the true conception of God, he was able to see how God could be immutable and evils nonetheless exist.⁵²

⁴⁹ *Confessions*, VII.3.4, VII.7.11.

⁵⁰ Menn 82.

⁵¹ Menn 131 2.

⁵² Menn 140.

By 'vision' Menn may mean a 'vision that'; in this case, a vision that there is an immutable God to be sought and served. That I think would be closer to both the spirit and letter of Augustine at this point. An alternative meaning, 'vision' as 'vision of God', understood as an instance of 'seeing God', proves to be an exaggeration when compared with the text in book VII. It is not as if that 'vision' occurred in a context-free way, or that Augustine had deliberately cleared his mind of all previous beliefs and claims to knowledge as Descartes later believed himself to have done. Augustine believed, he tells us, that the words he read in the Platonist literature were equivalent in meaning to some of the words from the Prologue of John's Gospel.⁵³ Not to all of the words, however. For he insists that there was nothing equivalent in that literature to the idea that the word of God was made flesh, or that it was possible for men and women to receive him. Did the Platonists teach some form of the eternal generation of the Son? Perhaps. What about his Incarnation? Certainly not. Nevertheless, their books acted as a kind of voice from God himself. Are they a vivid instance of what Calvin later on called the *sensus divinitatis*? There is no record that Calvin held any opinion about the significance of the books of the Platonists for Augustine, but he could have understood them in this way, for he stresses that the *sensus divinitatis* manifests itself in many different ways.

There is an interval of discussion in the *Confessions* between the words already quoted and the account shortly to follow. These are either two accounts of the same thing, or of two different phases of experience. What Augustine says in that interval is crucial to our understanding. He tells us that in his Manichaean phase his soul created for itself 'a god pervading all places in infinite space.'⁵⁴ This god he now abandoned. God is spirit, immutable and eternal, supremely good, giving all else its being which is also good. Augustine thought that as such he is incapable of pervading all places in infinite space. He had found an intellectually satisfactory way of abandoning Manichaean dualism.

One of the fruits of this 'vision', whatever its exact character, is that Augustine is able to begin to develop a grammar of God, about whom such questions as 'Where is he?' and 'How long has he existed?' make no sense.⁵⁵ In a way, the whole of books XI and XII of the *Confessions* is Augustine's brilliant attempt to set forth this new grammar in relation to time and (to a lesser extent) to space, and to the creation. The discipline of

⁵³ *Confessions*, VII.9.14.

⁵⁴ *Confessions*, VII.14.20. Compare VII.1.2 for his earlier corporeal account of God.

⁵⁵ *Confessions*, X.25.36 7.

ascent through the mind led to a momentous conclusion: he now understood the point of the language of divine immutability used by the Church about God, part of the faith he already adhered to. ‘That you exist and are immutable substance and care for humanity, and judge us . . . These matters, therefore, were secure and firmly fortified in my mind while I was seeking feverishly for the origin of evil.’⁵⁶ Such a God cannot be the source of evil. It must be sought elsewhere:

At that point it [Augustine’s mind] had no hesitation in declaring that the unchangeable is preferable to the changeable, and that on this ground it can know the unchangeable, since, unless it could somehow know this, there would be no certainty in preferring it to the mutable. So in the flash of a trembling glance it attained to that which is. At that moment I saw your ‘invisible nature understood through the things which are made.’ (Rom. 1.20) But I did not possess the strength to keep my vision fixed. My weakness reasserted itself, and I returned to my customary condition.⁵⁷

That was his custom of thinking of God in sensuous terms, which he learned from the Manichees.

It is true that Augustine used visual language to characterize intellectual understanding.⁵⁸ But nothing can have been further from his mind than a dream-like experience. He ‘saw’ God’s ‘invisible nature’ with his ‘mind’s eye’, quoting Romans 1: 20, a verse he uses more than once in this episode.⁵⁹ Romans 1: 20 is taken to refer to the intellectual process of moving from the ‘things that are made’ to the ‘invisible God’, though not by interpreting the verse as a compressed cosmological argument, but as warranting a movement through the mind to God, by a process of both negation and elevation.⁶⁰ The vision of the invisible God has to be, in the nature of the case, not something sensual or quasi-sensual, such as a dream or flash of light in the visual field. (‘If only they could see the eternal to be inward!’⁶¹)

How else but by regarding the object of his ‘vision’ as being something non-visual could Augustine believe that what the Platonists instilled into him, a way of thinking and of apprehending, recovered him from Manichaeism? What is a non-visual vision like? Perhaps it is like an arresting realization that comes immediately; in this case, the realization of God’s

⁵⁶ *Confessions*, VII.7.11.

⁵⁷ *Confessions*, VII.17.23.

⁵⁸ *Confessions*, VII.10.16, VII.12.18.

⁵⁹ *Confessions*, VII.10.16, VII.17.23, VII.20.26.

⁶⁰ As Calvin seems to have regarded it: *Comm.* Rom. 1: 20.

⁶¹ *Confessions*, IX.4.10.

essential spirituality, an intuitive realization arriving with the blinding force of a flash of light, something that takes hold of the mind in the same way that a blinding flash fills the visual field.

Besides 'seeing', Augustine tells us that he also 'heard.' 'I heard in the way one hears within the heart, and all doubt left me.'⁶² Such seeing and hearing cleared away his doubt. 'I was in no kind of doubt to whom I should attach myself, but was not yet in a state to be able to do that.'⁶³ Phrases like this are of great significance, according to Menn. Augustine knows that such a God exists because he has been vouchsafed a 'glimpse' of him.

It cannot be denied that through the 'vision' for the first time Augustine became certain of God's eternal life. 'All doubt had been taken from me that there is indestructible substance from which comes all substance. My desire was not to be more certain of you but to be more stable in you.'⁶⁴ No longer was a reference, for example, to divine immutability merely the language of the Christian community, from now on it is the truth of the matter. 'By inward goads you stirred me to make me find it unendurable until, through my inward perception, you were a certainty to me.'⁶⁵ According to Menn, Descartes was to be attracted by this Augustinian certainty.

Such language, then, was not mere rhetoric, metaphor, something to be allegorized away. It was directly revealed to him that God *is* immutable truth, because for a fraction of a second it had come to him, as in a flash of light, validating itself, that for there to be truths there must be the truth itself, for there to be mutable things there must not only be the concept of the immutable, but someone who is immutable—God is the immutable one, with goodness to match. Little wonder that given the prevalence of this impression of light Augustine thought that the 'light' occurring in the Prologue to John's Gospel referred to the same thing, though with the added bonus, never to be derived from the Platonists, of the revelation of the Incarnation of the Logos and the self-offering of this mediator.⁶⁶

Menn treats *Confessions* VII as a case of faith seeking understanding, but I think that this needs careful thinking about. For it is striking that the language of the Augustinian 'faith seeking understanding' motif is noticeably absent from this episode, though it appears later, in book XI for example. However we characterize Augustine's 'vision', it is not an inferred conclusion from a process of ratiocination, though it was preceded and followed by reasoning, but it has a highly immediate and intuitive,

⁶² *Confessions*, VII.10.16.

⁶³ *Confessions*, VII.16.22.

⁶⁴ *Confessions*, VIII.1.1.

⁶⁵ *Confessions*, VII.8.12.

⁶⁶ *Confessions*, VII.18.24.

non-inferential, centre. And it resulted in permanent intellectual gain, the assurance that this is the true God.⁶⁷

Menn is certainly correct to say that ‘Platonist philosophy reoriented Augustine.’⁶⁸ It had a permanent effect, like finding the key to a secret code. Nevertheless, important though this episode of the ‘books of the Platonists’ was for Augustine—and it certainly left an abiding impression on the rest of his thought—he quickly put it in its place, so to speak.

The mood of the narrative changes. There rapidly follows a Christian commentary on the significance of the books: his estimate of them and of the experience.⁶⁹ He sees his providential direction to them, and his use of them, as only a contingent feature of his pilgrimage. The books were a catalyst. They taught him that truth was invisible by proposing a method for discovering this. However, he believes that he could have gained what he in fact gained from the Platonists and more, from Scripture alone. ‘None of this is in the Platonist books’;⁷⁰ in particular, no true knowledge of the self. So while this important episode contributed to the Augustinian project of knowing God and the soul, such knowledge cannot be said to consist in this. That project was not a gift of the Platonists to Augustine, not at least in his own estimate of things. Menn is good on the Christian difference, and its place in Augustine’s search for wisdom.⁷¹

In his early dialogue on free will, *de Libero Arbitrio* (begun in 388, the year following his conversion, and which was in effect a commentary on the material that came to form a section of book VII of the *Confessions*⁷²), Augustine attempts to communicate the vision discursively, or at least the results of the vision. The *de Libero* mirrors the *Confessions* doctrinally—the self and immutability, the significance of the willing of evil, the privative nature of evil, and Augustine’s ‘all things considered’ theodicy. Employing his familiar *si fallor sum* premise, he argues from consciousness to God, from his own mutability to the immutable God. The soul establishes the certainty of the existence of God. So in the *de Libero* there is a discursive equivalent of the ‘vision’ of the *Confessions*. It is the certainty conveyed by the vision in the ratiocinative form of the *de Libero* that seems to have attracted Descartes, of which more later.⁷³

⁶⁷ *Confessions*, VII. 21.7.

⁶⁸ Menn 132.

⁶⁹ *Confessions*, VII.8.12–13.

⁷⁰ *Confessions*, VII.11.27.

⁷¹ Menn 197, 199.

⁷² Menn 123–7.

⁷³ Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, trans. A. S. Benjamin and L. H. Hackstaff (Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs Merrill, 1964).

CALVIN AND AUGUSTINE

In his use of Augustine what Calvin latches on to is what, for Augustine, came after the vision, the knowledge of God and of ourselves which it initiated and made possible. Although Calvin looks to the Bishop of Hippo for much of his theological inspiration, or at least for the formulation of it, we need to bear in mind that he is by no means an uncritical Augustinian. This often comes out in incidental details. So in his work on predestination, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, Calvin notes that Augustine's account of evil as a privation, which he accepts as true, is nonetheless a subtlety 'which does not satisfy many';⁷⁴ and elsewhere he is critical of Augustine's platonically influenced account of the creation:

Augustine, who is excessively addicted to the philosophy of Plato, is carried along, according to custom, to the doctrine of *ideas*; that before God made the world, he had the form of the whole building conceived in his mind; and so *the life* of those things which did not yet exist *was in Christ*, because the creation of the world was appointed in him. But how widely different this is from the intention of the Evangelist we shall immediately see.⁷⁵

So one line of Calvin's criticism is over the evident or avowed Platonism of Augustine. We may also see such filtering of Augustine's thought at work in the way in which Calvin assimilates the Augustinian theme of the interrelatedness of the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But it must also be remembered that Calvin was never in agonies over Manichaeism and over what might take its place.

So we should not assume, a priori, that in developing his thoughts on the relation between the knowledge of God and of ourselves Calvin slavishly follows Augustine. It is obvious that he cannot do that, for we have seen that this theme is an important strand in his discussion of the nature of faith, and the relationship between faith and assurance. And though Augustine discusses the place of faith in justification, and the relation of faith to belief (as we will note in Chapter 7), there is nothing comparable in Augustine to Calvin's discussion of the nature of faith. The Reformation *sola fide* had intervened, as well as Calvin's genius as a 'theologian of the Holy Spirit.'

For another thing, there appears to be nothing in Calvin's experience that corresponds to what, for Augustine, followed the reading of the books of the Platonists. It is true that Calvin, by comparison with Augustine, was

⁷⁴ *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (1552), trans. J. K. S. Reid (London: Clarke, 1961), 169.

⁷⁵ *Comm.* John's Gospel 1: 3, perhaps a reference to Book XII of the *Confessions*.

a very reticent, private individual. Nonetheless, he tells us something of his conversion and of other turning points in his life, and from time to time he mentions his own character traits. But even if we were to read portions of the *Institutes* autobiographically, there is nothing that corresponds in Calvin's experience to Augustine's 'ascent.' We have noted that at the centre of Augustine's experience of 'ascent' to God is both a metaphysical and an epistemological conclusion. As a result, he both learns how to think about God, and is certain of him. Through the use that he makes of these conclusions, in the *de Libero* he endeavours to bring them to others in a discursive way. There is nothing like this in Calvin—no vision, and no concern to establish the certainty of God's existence in such a manner.

Nevertheless, in the context of the Reformation and of his polemic against the Church of Rome, Calvin was most certainly interested in certainty, in the assured authority of Holy Scripture and what it teaches, and in the assurance of faith, as we have already noted. Calvin believed that he and all other Christians have certainty, or may have it, through the work of the Holy Spirit illuminating the revealed truth of Holy Scripture.⁷⁶ But of course he does not discuss the character of this certainty in epistemological vein, carefully comparing it with that incorrigibility that later on Descartes was to claim for his knowledge of himself—though it is interesting that there is one isolated example of an Augustinian (and by implication a Cartesian) turn of phrase. In his early *Psychopannychia* (1542) a sustained polemic against the Anabaptist doctrines of post-mortem 'soul sleep' and of 'mortalism', commenting on Hebrews 11: 6 ('they desire a better country'), Calvin says:

Here our opponents argue as follows: If they desire a heavenly country, they do not already possess it: We, on the contrary, argue; If they desire, they must exist, for there cannot be desire without a subject in which it resides.⁷⁷

Calvin here commits himself to 'Necessarily, if A desires, then A exists.' This was, for him, in the case in hand, a refutation of the doctrine of 'mortalism', the belief that at the death of the body the soul also died, albeit temporarily, a refutation drawn from a premise of Holy Scripture. Despite at least one commentator drawing a parallel with Descartes's *cogito*, it would be unwise to ascribe any greater epistemological significance to it than Calvin supplies in the context.⁷⁸ It is an exaggeration to suppose that '[b]oth Calvin and Descartes start from an Augustinian premise, namely that personal experience is our gate of access to being.

⁷⁶ *Inst.* I.7. ⁷⁷ *Psychopannychia*, in *Selected Works*, iii. 473.

⁷⁸ George Tavard, *The Starting Point of Calvin's Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 103.

Calvin, however, places the experience of the self in desire rather than, as Descartes does, in thought.⁷⁹ This is to promote an inference from a biblical text into a fundamental epistemic principle. It is not so much the individual experience of desire but the fact of post-mortem desire from which Calvin draws the inference that therefore there must be post-mortem awareness.

Further, Calvin's appreciation of divine transcendence was couched in much more negative terms than Augustine's; he stresses the incomprehensibility of God, the 'secrets' of his providence and grace, the fact that we cannot know God 'in himself', and the inscrutability of his will. Calvin was not so much concerned with scepticism as with what does and ought to count as the knowledge of God in the Church. No mere assent, not implicit faith, was sufficient, only explicit trust in God as he is to us, the God of the covenant, the God of promise. So, much of what there was of value for Descartes in Augustine passes Calvin by.

In addition, Calvin differs rather markedly from Augustine in one respect that we have not so far brought out very fully, and this also will be significant when, in the next chapter, we consider the question of the reception of Descartes and Cartesianism in the Reformed Churches. We noted at the beginning of the chapter that in the opening sentences of the *Institutes* not only does Calvin assert the importance of the knowledge of God and of ourselves, but he imparts his own distinctive emphasis to this. He finds in our knowledge of God as Creator another source of wisdom. Calvin here opens the door on to a significant difference between Augustine and himself over what I will call 'worthwhileness', a difference which at the same time brings him nearer to Descartes. We now go on briefly to look at this, and to tease out some of its importance for our theme.

Contrary to a widespread misconception, Augustine certainly had a positive view of the body, and of the physical world in general. It was after all the creation of God, and was originally good. And he had been emancipated from Manichaeism. Yet he never ceased to be concerned with his own physicality and with what he judged to be its negative impact on his life with God. The external world was also distracting. The lizard on the wall is something that, despite himself, fascinated Augustine. But it is a distraction which results in his mind being filled with 'a mass of empty thoughts',⁸⁰ not something to be interested in or to wonder at. For Augustine, the place of the physical world was an

⁷⁹ Tavad, *Starting Point*, 103.

⁸⁰ *Confessions*, X.35.57.

element in a lifelong tension, a deep strain in his thought between use and enjoyment, *uti* and *frui*—a strain revealed, for example, in human friendship, and in his reaction to the death of his mother, Monica.⁸¹

Augustine sets out the distinction between *uti* and *frui* in a rather deadpan, matter of fact way in his *On Christian Teaching*:

There are some things which are to be enjoyed, some which are to be used, and some whose function is both to enjoy and use. Those which are to be enjoyed make us happy; those which are to be used assist us and give us a boost, so to speak, as we press on towards our happiness, so that we may reach and hold fast to the things which make us happy. And we, placed as we are among things of both kinds, both enjoy and use them; but if we choose to enjoy things that are to be used, our advance is impeded and sometimes even diverted, and we are held back, or even put off, from attaining things which are to be enjoyed, because we are hamstrung by our love of lower things.⁸²

Yet things are not always that clear for Augustine:

When you enjoy a human being in God, you are enjoying God rather than that human being. For you enjoy the one by whom you are made happy, and you will one day rejoice that you have attained the one in whom you now set your hope of attaining him . . . Yet the idea of enjoying someone or something is very close to that of using someone or something together with love.⁸³

There is enough ambivalence here to have provoked a justifiable scholarly controversy over the relation of *uti* to *frui* in Augustine.⁸⁴

Calvin has a different emphasis. He does not seem to have been plagued by physical temptations as Augustine was, any more than he was attracted by the pull of Platonism, and, as a consequence, and as a part of his reaction against the medieval clergy–laity distinction, he himself supported secular disciplines and callings, and emphasized, with Luther, their legitimacy. He was, after all, at one time destined for the law, and then set out to become a Renaissance scholar. In his conversion he does not turn his back on all this, but comes to have a different estimate of it.

At the personal level he did not feel the strain between *uti* and *frui* as Augustine did. He was aware of the dangers of misusing things below, and setting one's affection on things below and not on things above. We will

⁸¹ On one aspect of this tension see Paul Helm, 'Augustine's Griefs', in William E. Mann (ed.), *Augustine's Confessions* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

⁸² *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 9.

⁸³ *On Christian Teaching*, 25.

⁸⁴ For a summary of this see Raymond Canning, 'uti/frui', in Allan D. Fitzgerald (ed.), *Augustine Through the Ages* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999).

look at this, and at the different kind of strain that it imposes on Calvin's thought, in Chapter 10. Nevertheless, in drawing the distinction between 'things below' and 'things above', a distinction he took, of course, from the New Testament,⁸⁵ and giving overriding importance to the second, Calvin recognized the legitimacy of the first in a way that Augustine found it difficult to do. He was comfortable with the everyday world in a way that Augustine never was, not at least after his conversion.

As far as one can tell Calvin finds little or no tension in *uti* and *frui* because he thinks, in a fairly straightforward way, that the same things can be both used and enjoyed. This is because he believed that many created things possess features which are at one and the same time both useful and enjoyable, and are designed as such by their creator. In his treatment of marriage he writes that man may 'enjoy a help-meet for him',⁸⁶ something that it would be difficult to imagine Augustine saying. In his discussion of the present life and its helps it is striking that Calvin has a positive view of life which goes well beyond regarding it as merely a disposable means to a greater end. There is not only necessity, but delight:

For if we are to live, we must use the necessary supports of life; nor can we even shun those things which seem more subservient to delight than to necessity. We must therefore observe a mean, that we may use them with a pure conscience, whether for necessity or for pleasure.⁸⁷

He refers to

some good and holy men who, when they saw intemperance and luxury perpetually carried to excess, if not strictly curbed, and were desirous to correct so pernicious an evil, imagined that there was no other method than to allow man to use corporeal goods only in so far as they were necessities: a counsel pious indeed, but unnecessarily austere; for it does the very dangerous thing of binding consciences in closer fetters than those in which they are bound by the word of God.⁸⁸

Calvin counsels moderation, and enjoyment, not abstinence. Our guide is to discern the end for which God gave us the gifts. They are for our good, not our ruin:

Now then, if we consider for what end he created food, we shall find that he consulted not only for our necessity, but also for our enjoyment and delight. Thus in clothing, the end was, in addition to necessity, comeliness and honour; and in herbs, fruits and trees besides their various uses, gracefulness of appearance and sweetness of smell . . . The natural qualities of things themselves demonstrate to

⁸⁵ *Inst.* III.10.2.

⁸⁶ *Inst.* II.8.41.

⁸⁷ *Inst.* III.10.1.

⁸⁸ *Inst.* III.10.1.

what end, and how far, they may be lawfully enjoyed. Has the Lord adorned flowers with all the beauty which spontaneously presents itself to the eye, and the sweet odour which delights the sense of smell, and shall it be unlawful for us to enjoy that beauty and this odour? What? Has he not so distinguished colours as to make some more agreeable than others? Has he not given qualities to gold and silver, ivory and marble, thereby rendering them precious things above other metals and stones? In short, has he not given many things a value without having any necessary use?⁸⁹

No tension here, then, between use and enjoyment or delight. Certainly not an emphasis upon the first to the exclusion of the second, but moderate enjoyment, moderate delight, as expressed in this amusing passage:

For many are so devoted to luxury in all their senses that their mind lies buried; many are so delighted with marble, gold, and pictures, that they become marble-hearted—are changed as it were into metal, and made like painted figures. The kitchen, with its savoury smells, so engrosses them that they have no spiritual savour.⁹⁰

This outlook translates itself into Calvin's regard for secular callings, including those of philosophy, law, and medicine, as quaintly expressed in Arthur Golding's translation of part of a sermon on Job:

Furthermore, they have also trades and handicraftes: as, one is a Baker, another a Plowman, another a Shoemaker, and another a Clothyer: and all these trades are the gift of God, and they be common, as well to the unbelievers, as to the faythfull whome God hath inlightened by his holy spirite . . . to speake of some handicraft: before a man come to be cunning in the occupation, he shall find straunge things: yea there are some woorkes that require such cunning, as ye would woonder. Howe is this possible to be done, will men say? Howe coulede men know where Golde lyeth in the earth? Beholde men make Salt of water. Howe commeth that to passe? Surely even bycause God has given men the skill . . . When wee once knowe these things, wee thinke them not straunge at all, but yet is it God that hath given us the skill of them⁹¹

Calvin and Calvinism, while generally Augustinian in outlook, had a regard for those callings that proved to be the seedbed of modern science, and so of modern industry—an outlook that was quite foreign to Augustine himself. The wisdom of God could be known in these ways also, and those who are properly versed in them would become, in their turn, wise. Such wisdom is enjoyable and worth having for its own sake, even though

⁸⁹ *Inst.* III.10.2.

⁹⁰ *Inst.* III.10.3.

⁹¹ *Sermons of Maister John Calvin, upon the Book of Job*, trans. Arthur Golding (London, 1574; repr. in facsimile, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1993), 477.

it is eclipsed by God's saving wisdom as revealed in Jesus Christ, the key to which is the fear of God.

CALVIN AND DESCARTES

An attempt at a positive comparison between Calvin and Descartes is likely to be met by pained surprise. And yet there is some initial warrant for this in what Stephen Menn has shown to be the Augustinianism of Descartes; both Calvin and Descartes are 'Augustinians.' In this last section of the chapter we will consider how the Augustinian motif of the knowledge of God and of ourselves was modified in the hands of Descartes, by comparison with how it fared with Calvin. The differences outweigh the similarities. Nevertheless, the existence of a common Augustinian framework might have meant that Cartesianism could have succeeded better than it did as the philosophy of the Reformed.

Descartes, like Calvin, has interesting things to say about the knowledge of God and of ourselves, though from the side of philosophy. In dedicating his *Meditations on First Philosophy* to the Dean and Doctors 'of the Sacred Faculty of Theology in Paris', Descartes says:

I have always considered that the two questions respecting God and the Soul were the chief of those that ought to be demonstrated by philosophical . . . argument . . . And, in truth, I have noticed that you, along with all the theologians, did not only affirm that the existence of God may be proved by the natural reason, but also that it may be inferred from the Holy Scriptures, that knowledge about Him is much clearer than that which we have of many created things, and, as a matter of fact, is so easy to acquire, that those who have it not are culpable in their ignorance.⁹²

He quotes Romans 1: 20 in support, which, as we have noted, was also a favourite text of Augustine in *Confessions* book VII and also a source for Calvin of his doctrine of the *sensus divinitatis* and possibly of cosmological arguments. Descartes thinks that that text warrants the view that 'all that which can be known of God may be made manifest by means which are not derived from anywhere but from ourselves, and from the simple consideration of the nature of our minds.' While characteristically Cartesian, this is a rather narrowly defined understanding of the Apostle Paul's reference to the knowledge of God being plain to everyone (Rom. 1: 19). Treating these two issues philosophically means proving them by the

⁹² *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, ed. E. A. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1931), i. 133 4.

natural reason alone. This is a procedure that is so easy to acquire that those who fail to do so are ‘without excuse’—also no doubt a reference to Romans 1: 20). It is interesting that he places establishing the existence of God in order before distinguishing body and proving soul. ‘I prove that there is a God, and that the human soul differs from the body.’⁹³ The latter is a means to the former. It is often said that for Descartes God plays second fiddle to the human self, that his philosophy is man-centred, not God-centred. But this is not altogether true. Yet, having said this, there is a distinctly elitist flavour about his project, since he alleges that many cannot follow the proofs.⁹⁴

Menn argues that the knowledge of the soul plays a subordinate role for Descartes. His main aim is to use it to arrive at the knowledge of God, from which the rest of our certain knowledge is to flow. On this account Descartes’s second Meditation does not aim to establish the existence of the mind *de novo*, in a situation of total scepticism. As Menn points out, in Descartes’s letter to Picot, the translator of the *Principles*, he does not deny that from all time there has been knowledge of his true principles, God and the soul, though less so in the case of God, which

has been placed in doubt by certain people because they have ascribed too much to the perceptions of the senses, and because God can neither be seen nor touched. But although all the truths which I place in my Principles have been known from all time and by all men, nevertheless there has never yet been any one, as far as I know, who has recognised them as the principles of philosophy, that is to say, as principles from which may be derived a knowledge of all things that are in the world: that is why it here remains to me to prove that they are such.⁹⁵

What Descartes is attempting to establish clearly and distinctly is the nature of the soul as an incorporeal substance, and so to use it as a principle for an argument for the existence of God. When everything is made doubtful, I know that I am conscious, and therefore that I exist. When everything else about me besides my soul is made doubtful, I know that God exists. What matters according to Menn is the third Meditation, and what it establishes, not the second, which is simply a prologue to it. Because his quest is philosophical, not religious, as a philosopher Descartes does not value the soul and its states in the way that Augustine and Calvin do. It is an epistemological springboard for a conclusion about God, and via God to the external world, where the real meat is.

⁹³ *Philosophical Works*, i. 136.

⁹⁴ *Philosophical Works*, i. 135.

⁹⁵ *Philosophical Works*, i. 209.

Descartes regards himself as prosecuting the project of Leo X (1475–1521) in the Fifth Lateran Council (1512–17) to provide philosophical arguments for the immortality of the soul. His basic idea is: theological arguments, which proceed from Scripture, do not provide us with demonstrable certainty, and they are thus not of much use apologetically. So philosophical arguments whose theological conclusions are certain are preferable. He believes that he can provide a limited number of these. He recognizes that his work is philosophical, not theological, and begs for it the protection of the Paris Faculty. With such an endorsement, together with a request for the correction of any of his errors (not something that Descartes generally welcomed), he somewhat optimistically concludes that ‘henceforward all the errors and false opinions which have ever existed regarding these two questions will soon be effaced from the minds of men.’⁹⁶

Although he is concerned with the knowledge of God and of ourselves, he does not regard the acquiring of such knowledge to be reciprocal, as Calvin did. For Descartes, the one leads to the other, but it does not involve the other. This is in a way a consequence of the fact that Descartes’s is a philosophical project, since the knowledge in question besides being immune to scepticism is also purely theoretical. Or perhaps we should say primarily theoretical. It would be rash to say more, in view of the fact that the proof of the existence of God via his principle of causality (in Meditation III) results in meditation of a more religious cast. Descartes pauses in his philosophical quest to ‘contemplate God Himself, to ponder at leisure His marvellous attributes, to consider, and admire, and adore, the beauty of this light so resplendent, at least as far as the strength of my mind, which is in some measure dazzled by the sight, will allow me to do so.’⁹⁷

Given this, Calvin would hardly have been warranted in concluding that the knowledge of God which forms Descartes’s quest is the sort of knowledge that ‘flits in the brain’, even though no doubt what Descartes here aspires to falls short of that knowledge of God and of ourselves which Calvin wrote the *Institutes* in order to foster. Calvin would also have taken comfort from the reserve with which Descartes treats the human mind’s approach to God. Descartes claims in the ‘Preface to the Reader’ of the *Meditations* that atheism is fostered by an anthropomorphic account of God, and by philosophical rationalism which attributes ‘so much strength and wisdom to our minds that we even have the presumption to desire to determine and

⁹⁶ *Philosophical Works*, i. 136.

⁹⁷ *Philosophical Works*, i. 171.

understand that which God can and ought to do.⁹⁸ Calvin himself could not have expressed the limitations of our knowledge of God *in se* any better.

In the *Meditations* Descartes subjects his own claims to such knowledge to a series of unrelenting sceptical doubts. In this, Menn has plausibly argued, he is heavily influenced by Augustine's ascent and the certainty that he enjoyed as a result; or perhaps, more cynically, Descartes sees the advantage to be gained by avowing the importance of Augustinian themes. He himself believes that he finds this indubitable foundation in the knowledge that he has of himself. But this knowledge is rather meagre, about as meagre as can be; it is merely the knowledge that he has a self, and that that self is an immaterial substance whose essence is consciousness, that even when he is doubting there is something that is doing the doubting of which he is indubitably aware, namely his own consciousness. The foundation of his certainty is in his consciousness as such rather than any particular content of his consciousness. It is this alone that provides it with sufficient epistemic strength to function as an epistemological foundation. *Cogito, ergo sum*. His foundationalism is thus anthropocentric and in this sense 'secular', though by taking the next step he intends it to lead to the sure knowledge of God.

Menn plausibly argues that from 1628 onwards Descartes sees his project to be that of providing certain knowledge that will be a basis for a new science in the Augustinian terms of the knowledge of God and the soul.⁹⁹ This project is unmistakably philosophical. The knowledge gained is not deeply personal and affective, or reciprocal, as it was with Augustine (and of course with Calvin), but (what is crucial for Descartes) it is theoretically certain and so, as he believes, impregnable. In keeping with this theoretical quest Descartes sees wisdom as consisting not in the knowledge of God and the soul in the Augustinian and Calvinian manner, but in the accumulation of as much knowledge as possible,¹⁰⁰ and the (theoretical) knowledge of God and of the soul provide necessary conditions for such knowledge.

Menn claims that Descartes's project intersects with that of the Counter-Reformation in its advocacy of an Augustinian, non-Aristotelian philosophical approach to knowledge. He argues for this, in brief, as follows. Descartes tells the *Sorbonnistes* that

many who were aware that I had cultivated a certain Method for the resolution of difficulties of every kind in the Sciences—a method which it is true is not novel,

⁹⁸ *Philosophical Works*, i. 138.

⁹⁹ *Philosophical Works*, i. 100.

¹⁰⁰ *Philosophical Works*, i. 204.

since there is nothing more ancient than the truth, but of which they were aware that I had made use successfully enough in other matters of difficulty—I have thought that it was my duty also to make trial of it in the present matter.¹⁰¹

According to Menn this is a reference to the so-called Bérulle incident at the end of 1628, the occasion of Descartes's 'turning point.' Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle was the leader of the Catholic Counter-Reformation in France. Under pressure from Bérulle, Descartes publicly distanced himself from some publicly debated philosophical proposals of le sieur de Chandoux, at a meeting at which Bérulle was present. During the course of his remarks Descartes hinted at his own position. As a consequence Bérulle later had a private discussion with Descartes at which he solemnly warned the philosopher of his responsibility 'before the sovereign Judge of men for the wrong he would have done the human race in withholding from it the fruit of his meditations.'¹⁰²

Menn's case that Descartes came to adopt a role as the proponent of a Counter-Reformation Augustinian philosophy is strengthened by the explicit contrast Descartes draws between himself and Aristotle.¹⁰³ On Descartes's view, Aristotelian philosophy can only provide arguments that are probable. Augustinianism alone is the road to certainty. Besides this emphasis on God and the soul, Descartes strikes other distinctively Augustinian notes; first, the Augustinian claim, embodied in his repeated *Si fallor sum*, to have immediate knowledge of the self.¹⁰⁴ And just as Augustine explains the origin of evil in the departure of the will from God, so in the fifth Meditation (for example) Descartes provides a free-will account of the origin of another evil, human error, the will overreaching itself.¹⁰⁵ He in effect provides a free-will defence against the charge that God is the author of error. Error is thus a form of non-being, another Augustinian note, though not one that, as we have seen, Calvin himself is enthusiastic about.¹⁰⁶

So, what are we to say about Calvin and Descartes? The knowledge of God and of ourselves, and the appeal to Romans 1, surely provides a common framework, whatever the differences. Echoing Paul, for Descartes God is understood from the things that have been made (Rom. 1:

¹⁰¹ *Philosophical Works*, i. 134 5. ¹⁰² Menn 48.

¹⁰³ Letter to Picot, in *Philosophical Works*, i. 203 4.

¹⁰⁴ Strangely enough, Menn sees no significant correspondence between the *si fallor sum* of Augustine and the *cogito ergo sum* of Descartes (Menn 232 3, 327, 330 1). For interesting discussion of the two see Gareth B. Matthews, *Thought's Ego in Augustine and Descartes* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992). Among Descartes's contemporaries, Mersenne, Colvius, and Arnauld each noted the resemblance between Augustine's and Descartes's reasoning (Matthews, *Thought's Ego*, 11).

¹⁰⁵ *Philosophical Works*, i. 175.

¹⁰⁶ *Philosophical Works*, i. 172 3.

20), in particular one thing that has been made, the soul. Both therefore ascribe a primacy to epistemology, though differently construed. Calvin makes no appeal to theoretical certainty, for epistemological grounding lies in reasons which yield 'opinion.' One can only go further than opinion in regard to the knowledge of God by means of the Holy Spirit's witnessing to the internal evidence of Scripture. So the Holy Spirit does most of the epistemological heavy lifting.

Nevertheless, the concepts of philosophy may be used to give us an understanding of theological ideas, particularly where these ideas are challenged. And the theologian may thus borrow, fairly eclectically, from his philosophical colleagues, as he judges fit. Descartes's programme surely falls well within the generous boundaries inside which, according to Calvin, the *sensus divinitatis* operates in fallen human nature. Further, a positive endorsement of Descartes's first proof of God's existence in the *Meditations* could not be ruled out, given the ambiguity of Calvin's attitude to discursive proofs of God's existence in the *Institutes* and elsewhere. It is not unreasonable to think that Calvin may have been receptive to certain kinds of natural theology, and it is clear that he was receptive to probabilistic arguments in support of the authority of Scripture. He was no stranger to the idea that the true knowledge of God may have aspects that are capable of being considered purely theoretically, just as he believed that aspects of the soul may legitimately be investigated by philosophers more thoroughly than is necessary for purely religious or theological purposes.¹⁰⁷

More generally, Calvin was a theologian respectful of the achievements of the philosophers, and even of their speculations, and with a positive view of 'science' and of its potential for human good and the glory of God. Yet while Descartes thinks of philosophy in almost exclusively epistemological terms he does employ the conceptual and metaphysical distinctions of the philosophical and theological tradition: essence and accident, privation, degrees of reality, various concepts of causation, and so forth. So to follow Descartes's approach would not be completely to separate philosophy from theology, yet it would be to insulate theology from epistemology, for according to Descartes epistemology is the exclusive province of philosophy and its main business. The consequence of such a separation is that for Descartes theology must exist in a kind of epistemic backwater in which it becomes increasingly fideistic and pragmatic in character, taking on an almost exclusively ethical role. In the next chapter

¹⁰⁷ *Inst.* I.15.6.

we will see his tendency to treat theology as something insulated from philosophy (understood almost exclusively as epistemology) at work in the *Conversation with Burman*, in Descartes's plea to keep theology simple. Theology, in so far as it is warranted, arises from an act of faith understood as an act of the will, the commitment to a religious authority.

Descartes and Reformed Theology

CALVIN'S attitude to philosophy has two characteristics. The first, as we have seen, is that he commits himself to the ancient quest for wisdom through self-knowledge. By and large he subscribes to the Augustinian version of this quest, that true wisdom consists in the knowledge of God and of ourselves. We have compared his outlook both with that of Augustine and with Descartes, who also frames his epistemology in Augustinian terms, and we have noted important similarities but also significant differences between the two. The second characteristic is that his attitude to philosophy and the classical philosophers is somewhat eclectic, as I tried to show in *John Calvin's Ideas*. We need to keep these two characteristics in mind in what follows. Part of our enquiry in this chapter is to see to what extent Calvin bequeathed this eclecticism to Reformed Orthodoxy.¹

We will do this by raising a question about the way in which Reformed theology developed in the era of Reformed Orthodoxy. The question is: Could not Cartesianism (that is, the main philosophical tenets and outlook of Descartes) have provided a philosophical underpinning for the Reformed theological curriculum, instead of the Aristotelianism that in some quarters at least became fairly entrenched? Or, putting the point more gently, could not Cartesianism have been a more prominent element in the eclecticism that underlay Reformed Orthodoxy? Here, of course, these questions relate solely to the coincidence or otherwise of ideas and interests, not the actual historical forces at work. So these questions are raised in a relatively abstract way, at the level of concepts and arguments rather than of historical forces.

THE RECEPTION OF CARTESIANISM

It is well known that, somewhat at odds with Calvin's own rather eclectic stance, the Reformed Churches in Geneva, and in Holland, though to a

¹ On this see, for example, Aza Goudriaan, *Reformed Orthodoxy and Philosophy, 1625–1750* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 54–5, 119–21. He cites, among others, Gisbert Voetius (1589–1676) and Petrus van Mastricht (1630–1706).

lesser extent in England and Scotland, pretty soon adopted a version of Aristotelianism as the basis for the teaching of philosophy and theology, though some flirted with Ramism as a philosophical option. This adoption was chiefly but not only at the level of scholastic method rather than Aristotelian doctrine. So Aristotle's account of causality was widely employed, but also an Aristotelian view of the person, but not (say) Aristotle's conviction that matter is eternal. By and large, mainstream Reformed theologians rejected the newfangled (as they saw it) philosophy of Descartes when it emerged in the 1640s on both philosophical and theological grounds, grounds that were (I think it is fair to say) mixed up with a good deal of politics as well. But there is evidence that the degree of entrenchment of Aristotelianism varied among the theologians, and also that some among them were attracted to Cartesianism, again with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Some, a minority, found Descartes congenial, though modifying his views even as they appropriated them. We will now consider some of this evidence.

In Utrecht those who held that Aristotelianism was in some sense integral to the right understanding of Scripture naturally enough reacted to Descartes with hostility. One only has to think of the attack on Descartes by Gisbert Voetius, Professor of Theology in Utrecht, following the Cartesian teaching first of Henricius Reneri (1593–1639) and of Henricius Regius (1598–1679) in Utrecht, and then of the Reformed theologian Abraham Heidanus (1597–1678) in Leiden.

One might imagine from the tone and the attitude of remarks of Descartes to and about Voetius that he was simply an antiquarian who was incapable of thinking a new thought. But the picture that J. A. van Ruler² and more recently Aza Goudriaan paint is of a person with a fully worked-out philosophical theology which *inter alia* integrated theology and physical science, giving primacy, of course, to theology. To Voetius, a philosophical view that entails an obvious theological error must itself be erroneous.

Some of the complexities at work in Reformed Orthodoxy's encounter with Descartes can be seen in connection with the idea of *creatio ex nihilo*. The position of the Orthodox, at least as represented by Petrus van Maastricht (1630–1706), is that the creation of matter occurred on the first day of Genesis 1, and on the subsequent days God continued the work of *creatio ex nihilo* by creating substantial forms. So that *creatio ex nihilo* was spread

² J. A. van Ruler, *The Crisis of Causality: Voetius and Descartes on God, Nature and Change* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

over a period of time, and thereafter the creation was conserved, allowing for a clear distinction between creation and conservation.

Van Mastricht was aware that this is sharply at odds with the more evolutionary ideas of Descartes:

Although He had not, to begin with, given this world any other form than that of chaos, provided that the laws of nature had once been established and that He had lent His aid in order that its action should be according to its wont, we may well believe, without doing outrage to the miracle of creation, that by this means alone all things which are purely material might in course of time have become such as we observe them to be at present.³

Naturally enough, van Mastricht offers objections to such claims.⁴

However, in his account of the creation in the *Institutes* Calvin appears to write in terms that at the very least permit ‘creation’ to be reserved for the original chaos, and the work of the other five ‘days of creation’ to be, strictly speaking, the development of the chaos:

From this history [Genesis 1] we learn that God, by the power of his Word and Spirit, created the heavens and the earth out of nothing (*creasse ex nihilo*); that thereafter he produced (*produxisse*) things inanimate and animate of every kind, arranging an innumerable variety of objects in admirable order, giving each kind its proper nature, office, place, and station; at the same time as all things were liable to corruption, providing for the perpetuation of each single species, cherishing some by secret methods, and, as it were, from time to time instilling new vigour into them, and bestowing on others a power of continuing their race, so preventing it from perishing at their own death.⁵

This, at least, is how B. B. Warfield interprets Calvin’s words:

With Calvin, while the perfecting of the world—as its subsequent government—is a process, creation, strictly conceived, tended to be thought of as an act. ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth’: after that it was not ‘creation’ strictly so called, but ‘formation’, gradual modelling into form, which took place.⁶

Here it may be thought that in the matter of creation and conservation Calvin is closer to Descartes than he is to the Aristotelianism of the

³ *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, ed. E. A. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1931), i. 109 (*Discourse on Method*, pt. V).

⁴ Goudriaan 108 9.

⁵ *Inst.* I.14.20.

⁶ ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of Creation’, in *Calvin and Calvinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), 299.

Orthodox. But to be balanced against this is Descartes's reluctance to admit the occurrence of anomalies such as miracles.

In his discussion of the impact of Descartes on Voetius, J. A. van Ruler has focused on the issue of the nature of causation. In doing so he has provided a fascinating insight into the way in which, by the time of Voetius, Aristotelianism, particularly the Aristotle of the Christian commentaries on his philosophy, had become deeply integrated into Voetius' Reformed theology. On the evidence provided by Voetius' essay 'On the Natures and Substantial Forms of Things'⁷ he took it for granted that Aristotle's essentialism, expressed in terms of form and matter, provides powerful support for the Genesis account of creation according to kinds and for the distinction between primary and secondary causation. The orders of creation are orders of Aristotelian essences, and it became almost unthinkable to Voetius that such firm fabric woven from Scripture and Aristotle could be supplanted by a more developmental or evolutionary view by the upstart Descartes.⁸

Voetius celebrates this interweaving of theology and philosophy by his estimate of the importance, even the necessity, of Aristotelianism not only for endorsing the Genesis account of creation of kinds, but for elaborating the biblical view of the divine upholding of the creation, and holding in appropriate tension the respective metaphysical roles of secondary causation and its relation to God, the primary cause. The divine conservation was understood to be an upholding and keeping in being of creaturely orders of things which were, due to Aristotle's teleology (as developed in book II of the *Physics*), themselves centres of agency. A cow had a particular *telos*, a tree another kind of *telos*, and so on (mules provided an interesting 'hard case' to this account), and God as the primary cause upheld and concurred in the activity of the created order by governing the various kinds and their members to their ends and, ultimately, to his own end. This is, of course, only one case of Aristotelian influence, and does not of itself signal a general appropriation of Aristotle. Perhaps Voetius thought Descartes's idea posed a threat because of its own hegemonic tendencies, or because of its physical mechanism, but that it could otherwise have been utilized in the usual eclectic fashion. Voetius may, in addition, have honestly believed that Aristotle simply codified common sense.

⁷ This short essay is a defence of substantial forms and individual natures. It can be found in G. Voetius, *Selectarum Disputationum Pars Prima* (Utrecht, 1648).

⁸ However, note Goudriaan's comments (116, 120) that Voetius was somewhat relaxed about substantial forms.

Voetius learned of the threat posed by Cartesian mechanism not only from Descartes himself but also from Regius, a professor of theoretical medicine at Utrecht and (to Descartes's annoyance) a somewhat free and easy exponent of his ideas.⁹ Such mechanism endangered the alliance of Aristotle and Scripture, because at one stroke it eliminated internal principles of causation, internal forces, in favour of accounting for movement and change by wholly external forces upon inert matter. Since in Voetius' view the Bible taught creation after various kinds, and these kinds had intrinsic powers, Cartesian mechanism cast a cloud over the authority of the Bible. In principle it would be possible for there to be a materialistic essentialism, with the Creator and human souls providing the *teloi*, but in fact at the purely physical level this was compromised by atomism. Van Ruler notes the way in which Voetius astutely anticipates that given Cartesianism 'all created substances would merely be accidental beings, collections, aggregates, and no essences or unique natures by themselves'.¹⁰

Furthermore, if there are no intrinsic forces, then Voetius believed that occasionalism was inevitable. For if we think not only of the divine moment-by-moment upholding of creation but also of the divine *con-cursus* of the creation through time, and if there are no physical causal forces, then God, in concurring with his creation, does so not by governing individual members of causal orders distinct from himself (other than humankind, of course, which possesses free will), but by continuing to impart physical forces to inert objects, forces of which he alone is the immediate source.¹¹

Van Ruler comments: 'Voetius' insight into these matters and his analysis of the consequences of the New Philosophy is remarkable. It was only two years later, in 1645, that Père Mesland was to discuss similar topics with Descartes in connection with the physical explanation of transubstantiation.'¹² So although there was novelty to Descartes's ideas, in another sense for Voetius it was old hat, a rehash of medieval occasionalism (if not in its premises then certainly in its conclusions), which earlier

⁹ Descartes and Regius quarrelled, and Descartes's *Notes Against a Certain Programme* (1647) was directed against Regius.

¹⁰ Van Ruler 241.

¹¹ It could even be said that Voetius was being unwittingly prophetic of a later Calvinism that internalized Lockean philosophy and Newtonian physics. Jonathan Edwards, for example, who largely abandoned the metaphysics of primary and secondary causality, scarcely avoids occasionalism, if indeed he does avoid it (see Oliver Crisp 'How "Occasional" was Edwards's Occasionalism?', in Paul Helm and Oliver D. Crisp (eds.), *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003)). We will consider Edwards's views further in Chapter 8.

¹² Van Ruler 241 n.

Christian thinkers (with the help of Aristotle) had rebutted and which could therefore be treated with a cheerful disdain. We have concentrated attention on van Ruler's account of the dispute over causation. But there is evidence that Voetius had other objections to Cartesianism, particularly to its scepticism, and its anthropology, and its doctrine of God. Just as important, and what made the rise of Cartesianism an issue in Utrecht, was its potential to disturb the existing academic integration in the University, in which a form of Aristotelianism was a common methodological component in philosophy, medicine, and theology.

The instance of Voetius, made prominent by the controversy with Cartesianism, illustrates how thorough the entrenchment of Aristotle within Bible exposition and theological construction could become. He also exemplifies a distinct theological attitude, according to which it is the role of the theologian, with the aid of philosophy, to fill in gaps in orthodox theology, and to reduce if not to eliminate the recognition of ineffability in the biblical account of things. Ineffability was not eliminated for Voetius, as is shown by his idea of *docta ignorantia*, learned ignorance.¹³ Nevertheless, there is a sense in which he sought answers to questions in a way that is rather foreign to Calvin. For Calvin, too, there are distinct causal orders, as I tried to show in *John Calvin's Ideas*, but he is much less eager to develop philosophical accounts of these, to make philosophical alliances, than was Voetius.

We move from Utrecht to Leiden. On the evidence provided by Theo Verbeek¹⁴ the reaction in the two universities to the rise of Cartesianism seems to have been rather different. As we have seen, due to the standing of Voetius in Utrecht the reaction there was hostile on both theological and philosophical grounds, though it also had an administrative and political dimension. Somewhat differently, in Leiden the 'crisis' had the character of a dispute between fellow academics, starting with a bitter disagreement between Adriaan Heereboord (1614–61), who became Professor of Logic at Leiden in 1648, and Adam Stuart (1591–1654), nominated over him in 1645, and also to involve a running battle with Jacobus Revius (1586–1658), the Regent of the Statencollege. Abraham Heidanus, who left the pulpit to become Professor of Theology in Leiden in 1647, was a more avowed follower of Descartes, and later there developed in Leiden what Verbeek refers to as a Cartesian 'network',¹⁵ in which Heidanus was involved.

¹³ Goudriaan 39, 120, 192.

¹⁴ *Descartes and the Dutch: Early Reactions to Cartesian Philosophy 1637–1650* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992).

¹⁵ *Descartes and the Dutch*, 70.

Following a change in his own position around 1644, Heereboord comes across as an enthusiastic Cartesian, though he was his own man. The evidence suggests that he was temperamentally averse simply to accepting philosophical views on the authority of Aristotle and integrating them into Christian theology in Voetian fashion. He may be said, then, to be against Voetian ‘rationalism’,¹⁶ but it is important to note that he is not against Voetian theology *per se*, for he endorsed Voetius’ orthodoxy. He valued disputations (which Descartes hated) and encouraged his students to argue and to look at both sides of the respective merits of Aristotelianism and Cartesianism as handmaidens and allies of Reformed theology.¹⁷ He seems to have had a genuinely philosophical spirit, while at the same time being against speculation and the discussion of useless questions.¹⁸ Heereboord defended the *cogito* on epistemological grounds (in preference to sense experience),¹⁹ making objections to the enslavement of theology to philosophical traditions, and defended Descartes both against the charge of atheism and in his abandoning of substantial forms.²⁰

In his attempt to set out the relation of reason to faith Heereboord makes the following points. In general, philosophy has independence and so can pursue its own agenda, but its relation to theology is subordinate to revelation (rather in the manner of faith seeking understanding), providing reasoned support for the divine mysteries, which are above reason and can only be apprehended. Reason, informed by the mysteries of the faith, is therefore simply instrumental. These claims²¹ suggest a generally more relaxed view of the relations between the two disciplines, and a less optimistic view of an alliance between a developed philosophy and the Christian faith. Heereboord avows the importance of the knowledge of God and of oneself as a starting point,²² but it is unclear if he means this in the Calvinian or in the Cartesian sense. He defends the use of Cartesian doubt against the charge of scepticism, and seems to regard it

¹⁶ Verbeek’s phrase (*Descartes and the Dutch*, 38, 90). It would, I think, be fairer to say that what Descartes challenged was a traditional view of the relation between Aristotle and the Christian faith. But it was not *simply* traditional, or antiquarian, as Descartes liked to portray it, but was regarded by its proponents not as the imposition of Aristotelian philosophy in an *a priori* fashion, but as a cooperative endeavour undertaken in the spirit of ‘faith seeking understanding’.

¹⁷ Verbeek, *Descartes and the Dutch*, 36.

¹⁸ Verbeek, *Descartes and the Dutch*, 65.

¹⁹ Verbeek, *Descartes and the Dutch*, 37.

²⁰ Verbeek, *Descartes and the Dutch*, 66.

²¹ These and other claims are set out verbatim by Verbeek (*Descartes and the Dutch*, 37–8).

²² Verbeek, *Descartes and the Dutch*, 38–9.

more as an intellectual discipline for clearing the mind of prejudice through intellectual self-examination.²³

While Heidanus was a minister he had written against Arminian and Socinian theology before becoming attracted to Cartesianism²⁴ and friendly with Descartes. His theological orthodoxy was therefore not in question. As noted, he was appointed Professor of Theology in Leiden in 1647. He was believed to have written the preface to Descartes's *Notes Against a Certain Programme*, composed to rebut Regius' ideas following his breach with him, and had it printed, apparently without Descartes's approval, in 1647. In his earlier work he had taken exception to the Arminians' appeal to 'sound reason', counter-arguing that the place of reason is never to judge the faith but to provide a logical structure for it; that is, to maintain its coherence and consistency.²⁵ This may appear to be a modest endorsement of Cartesianism. But it was for transgressing (by his writings) the resolution of the Curators of the University of Leiden of 1676, in which twenty Cartesian and Cocceian ideas were rejected, that he was dismissed from his post. In his later years Heidanus supported the occasionalist Arnold Geulincx (1624–69),²⁶ who in 1658 was forced out of Louvain, and went to Leiden, becoming a Protestant and teaching there until his death, though never attaining a professorship.

On the whole, Heidanus' theological approach was more directly biblical than theological, no doubt being supported in this by Johannes Cocceius (1603–69), an early Covenant theologian, who joined the faculty in 1650. Covenant theology, while fully orthodox, was more immediately biblical in its procedure and so depended less on dogmatic theology and the integration of philosophical concepts with it.

In his work on Copernicanism and the theological resistance to it from some of the Reformed, Rienk Vermij suggests that there is not only a coincidence between Cocceianism and Cartesianism, but that Cocceianism may have flourished because of the impact of Cartesianism.²⁷

²³ Verbeek, *Descartes and the Dutch*, 39. There is warrant for such a view in Descartes himself, as when, in his letter to Picot, he recognizes that he is promoting to the principles of philosophy truths which 'have been known from all time and by all men' (*Philosophical Works*, i. 209).

²⁴ Verbeek, *Descartes and the Dutch*, 70.

²⁵ Verbeek, *Descartes and the Dutch*, 70.

²⁶ Verbeek, *Descartes and the Dutch*, 75.

²⁷ *The Calvinist Copernicans: The Reception of the New Astronomy in the Dutch Republic, 1575 1750* (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, 2002), 320, 323–4. This suggestion may seem plausible, but it must be remembered that Covenant theology was also independently developed in England and Scotland in cultures that seem to have been ignorant of or indifferent to Cartesianism.

Heidanus was also friendly with Johannes de Raey (1622–1707), who gave private lessons in Leiden on Cartesianism and held public disputations. De Raey was happy, nonetheless, as far as theology is concerned, to be known as a Voetian. ‘I am called a Voetian. I am not ashamed of it . . . Voetius made many mistakes. He was a man like all of us. But he had some significant virtues, too.’²⁸

Heidanus, with others, attempted to integrate Cartesianism into academic teaching, including, of course, disputation, and they were also faced with the problem of the relation of philosophy to the faculties of theology and medicine.²⁹ Verbeek says that those attracted to Cartesianism such as Heidanus did not claim absolute certainty for the ideas of Descartes, and if so they were in a position to utilize Cartesian philosophy in theology in a way parallel to that of Voetius’ eclecticism. They did not need to defend the method of doubt, nor the peculiarities of Descartes’s doctrine of God.³⁰ Whether this amounts to a rejection of Cartesian metaphysics, as Verbeek claims, is not clear.³¹ What nowadays are studied separately, epistemology and metaphysics, were for Descartes tightly integrated, since the *cogito* and what follows is for him the only possible route to reliably acquiring metaphysical truths.

One of the more junior members of this Cartesian network of Reformed thinkers which developed in Leiden in the 1640s was Francis Burman (1628–79), then a student at Leiden. He became Professor of Theology in Utrecht in 1662, which in itself suggests some weakening of opposition to Cartesianism there. Descartes’s *Conversation with Burman* is an important source not only of Cartesian philosophy but also of Descartes’s personal theological ideas and his appreciation of the relation between philosophy and theology. We will briefly consider this before returning to the main question, concerning Cartesianism and Reformed Orthodoxy.

DESCARTES’S CONVERSATION WITH BURMAN

Examining the *Conversation with Burman*³² has two advantages: it has a late date (1648), two years before Descartes’s death, and it is the report of a conversation Descartes held with Francis Burman, a rather intelligent twenty-year-old theological student from the Reformed community. By

²⁸ Quoted by Verbeek (*Descartes and the Dutch*, 73).

²⁹ Verbeek, *Descartes and the Dutch*, 77.

³⁰ Verbeek, *Descartes and the Dutch*, 88.

³¹ Verbeek, *Descartes and the Dutch*, 88.

³² Translated with an introd. and commentary John Cottingham (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976).

this time Descartes had encountered the opposition to his views from Voetius, Revius, and others that we have been reviewing.

In the record of this conversation Descartes discloses some of his views on certain theological topics, as well as his opinion on the distinction between theology and philosophy. When questioned by Burman about the relation of his view of human freedom to questions of choice and good or evil he remarked:

We must leave the latter point for the theologians to explain. For the philosopher, it is enough to study man as he is now in his natural condition . . . With regard to supernatural matters, the theologians teach that this is an area where we are corrupted through original sin: we need grace to enable us to recognize and pursue the good in this sphere. Indeed, almost all sins have their source in ignorance, since no one can pursue evil *qua* evil. So it is through his grace that God has promised us eternal life—something no one would have thought of or ever aspired to—in return for those good works of ours which in any case we were bound to perform.³³

Another way of expressing the separateness was to emphasize that certain truths depend upon revelation. Because of this, because they are given to us by authority and not certified by reason, presumably, Descartes holds that

we cannot follow or understand their mutual connection in the same way [as geometry]. And certainly Theology must not be subjected to our human reasoning, which we use for Mathematics and for other truths, since it is something we cannot fully grasp; and the simpler we keep it, the better Theology we shall have. If the author thought anyone should abuse his Philosophy by taking arguments from it and applying them to Theology, he would regret all the trouble he had taken.³⁴

This looks like a recipe for keeping the two quite distinct, but at some intellectual cost to theology, which must be kept simple, and pretty much confined to the justification of keeping God's commands:³⁵

³³ *Conversation*, 21. 2. Descartes's attitudes to such matters fluctuate between respect, indifference, and hostility.

³⁴ *Conversation*, 46.

³⁵ What starts out by seeming to be a respectful attitude to theology and the divine revelation could easily become something else. Van Ruler recounts the amusing meeting of Descartes with Anna Maria van Schurman, a female student of Voetius. (She used to listen to Voetius' lectures from a specially prepared box so that she did not disturb the male students.) During a visit to Utrecht, Descartes found her reading the Bible, showing his surprise that she should spend her time on a matter of such small importance, adding that since he did not understand what Moses had to say he had abandoned studying the Bible altogether. It is not hard to imagine the horror of the Reformed at one for whom the clarity of innate ideas had supplanted the clarity of Scripture. Van Schurman vowed never to see Descartes again (Van Ruler 257 n. 44).

However, we can and should prove that the truths of Theology are not inconsistent with those of Philosophy, but we must not in any way subject them to critical examination . . . Why do we need to spend all this effort on Theology, when we see that simple country folk have just as much chance as we have of getting to heaven? This should certainly be a warning to us that it is much more satisfactory to have a Theology as simple as that of country folk than one which is plagued with countless controversies. This is how we corrupt Theology and open the way for disputes, quarrels, wars and such like.³⁶

Another reason for caution and simplicity in theology is that God has not revealed to us all his purposes. He has hidden many matters from us, for perhaps, for example, there are other worlds with creatures in them that are superior to us and that we cannot imagine.³⁷

Sometimes he turns the tables on philosophy. We have already discussed Voetius' reaction to his dismissal of teleology. In the *Conversation* he extends this to divine teleology, not of course denying it, but claiming that the divine purposes are hidden from us:

[A]ll the purposes of God are hidden from us, and it is rash to want to plunge into them. I am not speaking here of purposes which are known through revelation; it is purely as a philosopher that I am considering them. It is here that we go completely astray. We think of God as a sort of superman, who thinks up such and such a scheme, and tries to realise it by such and such means. This is clearly quite unworthy of God.³⁸

The only theological consequences that he himself appears to be prepared to draw are from his philosophical account of God as a perfect being, and the voluntaristic account that he gives of God's will. In discussing with Burman the eternity of God he holds that the enacted decrees of God are unalterable, and that it is now impossible, metaphysically, to conceive the content of some alternative divine decree.³⁹

Not only does Descartes wish to distance theology from philosophy, he also downplays metaphysics in favour of the study of physical nature:

³⁶ *Conversation*, 46–7. Compare his remarks on theology in the *Discourse on Method*: 'I honoured our theology and aspired as much as anyone to reach to heaven, but having learned to regard it as a most highly assured fact that the road is not less open to the most ignorant than to the most learned, and that the revealed truths which conduct thither are above our intelligence, I should not have dared to submit them to the feebleness of my reasonings; and I thought that, in order to undertake to examine them and succeed in so doing, it was necessary to have some extraordinary assistance from above and to be more than a mere man' (*Philosophical Works*, i. 85).

³⁷ *Conversation*, 36.

³⁸ *Conversation*, 19–20; see also 50.

³⁹ *Conversation*, 32.

It is sufficient to have grasped them [metaphysical questions] once in a general way, and then to remember the conclusion. Otherwise, they draw the mind too far away from physical and observable things, and make it unfit to study them. Yet it is just these physical studies that it is most desirable for men to pursue, since they would yield abundant benefits for life . . . It is sufficient to know the first book of the *Principles*, since this includes those parts of Metaphysics which need to be known for Physics and so on.⁴⁰

Yet Descartes sometimes ventures into offering his personal view of more complex theological issues. So he claims that God's ideas of possible things are not independent of God's will, depending upon his essence or power, perhaps, but according to him they are subject to his will. In his further discussion on the divine decrees, when he says that now it is impossible to conceive of God's decree as separable from himself, this is a remark about our epistemological condition, not about what may happen, given God's sovereignty and perfection, in the nature of things. If the unalterability of his decree is understood in this sense, Descartes argues that God cannot be changed as a result of our prayers. His doctrine of the immutability of the divine decree appears to take him in a predestinarian direction. Descartes holds that though we cannot at present understand this, God is supremely sovereign, and everything, without qualification, depends upon him. He has perfect freedom. However, we also have a freedom which is as perfect as God's, a thought familiar to the reader of the *Meditations*:

Let everyone just go down deep into himself and find out whether or not he has a perfect and absolute will, and whether he can conceive of anything which surpasses him in freedom of the will. I am sure everyone will find that it is as I say. It is in this, then, that the will is greater and more godlike than the intellect.⁴¹

It is this 'godlike' freedom, of course, that in the *Meditations* Descartes reckons is the source of error.

The main general impression that one gains from the *Conversation* is the way in which Descartes separates philosophy from theology, having a fairly fideistic attitude to it, and rests satisfied with a definite but simple metaphysical framework, preferring to give his attention to physical nature.

⁴⁰ *Conversation*, 30 1.

⁴¹ *Conversation*, 21.

Descartes's mechanical philosophy came to be of interest in Geneva later on, but here the story is rather different.⁴² When his influence began to be felt in Geneva through the arrival from Saumur of Jean-Robert Chouet (1642–1731) to the Chair of Philosophy in 1669, the chief area of concern for the authorities was focused on the current theological hot potatoes: Was Chouet tarred with the brush of hypothetical universalism and of the doctrine of the mediate imputation of Adam's sin, questionable doctrines which Saumur was disseminating? No questions seem to have been raised about his Cartesianism. It appears that he was able to satisfy the authorities as to his theological orthodoxy by separating philosophy from theology, and by agreeing not to teach anything that disturbed orthodoxy. In private correspondence, however, he uses Cartesianism in defence of a strong doctrine of divine sovereignty in his controversy with the rationalistically inclined scholasticism of his erstwhile Saumurian colleague Claude Pajon. In his teaching he was more interested in Cartesian mechanistic metaphysics than in Cartesian epistemology.⁴³ Nevertheless, he shared the anti-authoritarianism of Descartes, though limiting this to philosophy,⁴⁴ and was more interested in experimental science than was Descartes. He was able to present the conclusions of his scientific work as probabilistic and provisional, and so not threatening to theological orthodoxy.⁴⁵ Interestingly, he shared this attitude of the distinctness of theology and philosophy with his orthodox theological colleague Francis Turretin (1623–87), Professor of Theology in Geneva, who was himself far from hostile to the new philosophy of nature.⁴⁶

In his *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (1679–85) Francis Turretin illustrates the rather uneasy way in which Cartesianism was domesticated. Writing of the relation of philosophy to theology he says:

Although the philosopher may be allowed to begin with a doubt in order to [undertake] a safer investigation of natural things, yet this cannot be introduced into subjects of theology and faith. They are founded upon certain and indubitable principles and truths known per se, to doubt which is impious (as concerning the existence of God) unless we wish to strip ourselves of conscience and the moral dependence

⁴² For the narrative of this see Michael Heyd, *Between Orthodoxy and the Enlightenment* (The Hague, Nijhoff, 1982).

⁴³ Heyd 137.

⁴⁴ Heyd 69.

⁴⁵ Heyd 139.

⁴⁶ Heyd 165 7.

on the Creator . . . and thus to introduce philosophical doubt into religion and render the whole of theology sceptical.⁴⁷

Other theologians may be mentioned. The Reformed minister and theologian Samuel Maresius (1599–1673), Professor of Theology at Groningen in 1643, scorned the Voetian commitment to Aristotelianism as ‘papist’.⁴⁸ Lambertus Danaeus (1530–95), pastor and professor at Castres, Navarre, sharply distinguishes Aristotle from Moses, since Aristotle mistakenly gives an ultimacy to nature which only God has.⁴⁹ So Aristotle is deficient in that he does not recognize the priority of the divine wisdom and intelligence of God the Creator. The Reformed theologian Hieronymus Zanchius (1516–90), who became Professor of Theology at Heidelberg in 1568, and who had corresponded with Calvin, though noting the need not to pervert Scripture in order to conform to some philosophical idea, nevertheless in fact thinks that Aristotle is fully in accord with Scripture, as indeed is Plato’s idea of a world-soul, which is in keeping with the existence of the divine Spirit in whom we live and move and have our being.⁵⁰ Danaeus and Zanchius take formally the same position, that philosophies of nature should be assessed in terms of the Creator—creation account presented in Scripture. However, Danaeus thought no philosophical accounts succeed, while Zanchius seems to think that there is something of value in a variety of philosophies.⁵¹ So even if we look no further than these three Reformed theologians we see three different views of the relation of philosophy to theology. If Voetius’ approach was incompatible with Cartesianism, perhaps these three other approaches were less so. Certainly it would be a mistake to take Voetius as representative of more than one strand, albeit an important one, in Reformed understandings of the relation of philosophy to theology.

⁴⁷ *The Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. G. M. Giger, ed. J. T. Dennison (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P. & R., 1992 7), I. XIII.XIV.

⁴⁸ Verbeek, *Descartes and the Dutch*, 7.

⁴⁹ Van Ruler 80.

⁵⁰ Van Ruler 80 3.

⁵¹ For a fuller account see Van Ruler, ch. 3. The list of Reformed theologians who were exercised by the relation between philosophy (including natural philosophy) and theology could be extended—for example, to include the early Reformed theologian Bartholomeus Keckermann (1571–1609). See Richard A. Muller, ‘*Vera Philosophica cum sacra Theologia usquam pugnat*: Keckermann on Philosophy, Theology and the Problem for Double Truth’, in *After Calvin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

THE QUESTION OF CARTESIANISM AND ORTHODOXY

As Richard Muller points out, the avowed Cartesianism of the Reformed theologians Heidanus and Francis Burman did not place them beyond the pale of theological orthodoxy, even though it occasioned stress.⁵² But the tendency of Cartesianism was to turn all theology away from metaphysics into a practical or ethical discipline—a shift, however, that was shared by some non-Cartesians.⁵³

Muller also notes that as Reformed Orthodoxy developed, and the Reformed confessions became more detailed and nuanced in the light of various controversies, Cartesianism was not regarded as unorthodox at the confessional level.⁵⁴ This may be because the whole Reformed culture was adopting an attitude to philosophy that clearly demarcated it from theology. What it does show is that the theologians were more exercised by theological deviations within the Reformed camp than by the threat of a novel philosophical outlook. So while the *Formula Consensus Helvetica* (1675) identifies Saumurian deviations, hypothetical universalism (sect. V), and the mediate imputation of Adam's sin (sect. XII) as troublesome problems, there is no adverse reference to Cartesianism nor to the federalist theological scheme of Cocceius and others.⁵⁵ The relative weight the *Consensus* placed upon theological issues rather than on newfangled philosophy is borne out by the treatment of Chouet in Geneva noted earlier.

So our survey reveals that there is a variety of stances possible, and also that more general considerations, such as the relation of Scripture to common sense and the deployment of the idea of divine accommodation, lie in the background. We can attempt to distinguish these stances in the following way.

What might be called Voetianism appears to hold that a philosophical thesis or doctrine is sufficient for giving the meaning of some scriptural doctrine, and very likely necessary. For Voetius seems to have held that an Aristotelian account of generic essences is what is meant by 'after their kind' in the Genesis creation narrative, and a parallel account of individual essences accounts for the intrinsic causal powers of non-human animals. Is it also necessary? Could there be another, complementary,

⁵² *Post Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), i. 77.

⁵³ *Post Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, i. 344.

⁵⁴ *Post Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, i. 77; see also Verbeek, *Descartes and the Dutch*, 89.

⁵⁵ A modern translation of the *Consensus* is in *Creeeds of the Churches*, ed. John H. Leith (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1963).

philosophical account? It is not clear. One reason that it is not clear is that Voetius may have assumed that both the Genesis account of kinds and the Aristotelian account of substantial forms were simply common sense. After all, everyone can see that dogs produce dogs and do not produce cats, and that cats and dogs are centres of desire and of locomotion. However, Voetius seems to have thought that over and above the opinions of common sense it was desirable, and perhaps necessary, that there be some philosophical account or other. Does he hold this in respect of all scriptural doctrines? That also is not clear, but there seems to be an impetus in this direction. Interpreted in this fashion, there is little threat to the integrity of theology from a kind of philosophical hegemony, and so no danger of a rationalist takeover.

Second, it may be held that due to the distinctive characters of theology and philosophy, the source of the one in revelation, the other in reason, the two only intersect *per accidens*, and in an eclectic way. There seem to be elements of this in Descartes himself, who adopts a rather superior attitude to theology, and as we have seen is somewhat fideistic about the Christian religion, placing it outside the bounds of reason. Heidanus is more selective, picking and choosing from Descartes's thought, and adapting it to suit the requirements of theological education. The dangers on this side seem to be the emergence of some version of twofold truth, or of fideism in epistemology or instrumentalism in theology.

Third, it may be held that the conceptuality bequeathed by some philosophical positions is helpful in elucidating a doctrine (i.e. drawing out its implications), but not necessary or sufficient for giving the meaning of that doctrine. The terms of philosophy—such as nature, accident, essence, necessity—can be variously defined, and may prove useful for the purposes of theological systematization. Heereboord, who as we saw earlier thought that philosophy's role in theology was restricted to displaying the coherence and consistency of theological ideas, might be an example of this approach.

Perhaps if the writing of Scripture as regards the physical order is accommodated to common sense, one should not expect a correlation with physical theory, much less an integration with it, whether of an Aristotelian variety or some other kind.

So our question, in its gentlest form, is: Could Cartesianism have had a stronger place in Reformed Orthodoxy than in fact it did? Suppose that it had developed fifty years earlier, say? To attempt an answer to this question we must principally have in mind the developed theses of Cartesianism which might have a theological impact, and not merely or chiefly René Descartes's personal attitude to theology. Theologically

important topics in these developed theses are scepticism, the doctrine of clear and distinct ideas, Descartes's dualism, his view of human free will, his mechanistic account of the natural order, and his doctrine of God. There is little evidence that even strongish Cartesians such as Heidanus refer to Descartes's appeal to the knowledge of God and of ourselves, much less endeavour to correlate it with Calvin's own emphasis on the twofold knowledge of God. However, if we cast our net a little more widely, we note that the Reformed philosopher Johannes Clauberg (1622–65), Professor of Philosophy at Herborn from 1649, wrote a Cartesian tract published in 1656 on the very topic of the knowledge of God and of ourselves, *De Cognitione Dei et Nostri*,⁵⁶ though without mentioning Calvin. However, in his 'Cartesian defence' against Jacob Revius and Cyriac Lentulus he appeals beyond Descartes to Calvin on the matter of the interrelation of the knowledge of God and of ourselves. This supports our earlier impression that Cartesians (such as Clauberg) themselves become somewhat eclectic, and the cross-references between Descartes, scholasticism, and Calvin come to be somewhat complex. Even so, such direct appeals to Calvin seem to have been rare.

Calvin's emphasis upon divine accommodation had a more mixed reception.⁵⁷ We can distinguish two senses of the term as it came to be used. The first is very much in line with Calvin's own usage. That is, accommodation is taken as a theological concept whose sense and scope is determined internally, by scriptural precedent. Thus van Mastricht upheld this Calvinian approach, recognizing the place of non-literalness, allegory, anthropomorphism, and even prejudice, all of which may be vehicles of truth. Van Mastricht had quite a contest over this with Christopher Wittich (1625–87), a member of the Cartesian 'network'.⁵⁸ Voetius seems to have been somewhat more cagey. He recognizes Calvinian accommodation in principle, but is suspicious of it as undermining the Bible's accuracy in its reporting of physical matters, and the danger of reducing the Bible's role to teaching merely 'religious truth'. Voetius explicitly

⁵⁶ It was published in Clauberg's *Opera Omnia Philosophica*, ii (1691; repr. Hildersham: Georg Olms, 1968). I am grateful to Aza Goudriaan for pointing me in the direction of Clauberg. See also Theo Verbeek (ed.), *Johannes Clauberg (1622–1665) and Cartesian Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1999). According to Verbeek (p. 8), Clauberg's was a rather scholastic version of Cartesianism. Clauberg copied Burman's notes of his conversation with Descartes and this became the basis of the published version (Verbeek, *Descartes and the Dutch*, 75). On Clauberg see also Rienk Vermij, *The Calvinist Copernicans*, 257–8.

⁵⁷ For discussion of divine accommodation see Paul Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), ch. 7.

⁵⁸ Verbeek, *Descartes and the Dutch*, 74.

contrasts treating the language of the Bible as accommodated for reasons that are internal to it, and accommodating its language at the behest of philosophical or scientific views that are extra-scriptural.⁵⁹

Genesis 1: 16, with its reference to the moon as a 'great light', presents an interesting test case. Calvin had no hesitation in saying that the language was adapted to common understanding.⁶⁰ The text is not teaching, or implying, that the moon is greater in size than, say, Saturn, which astronomers have shown to be the larger of the two. Voetius took the reference to size to be a reference to appearance but also to point to the moon's capacity to spread light. The text is referring to it not as an immensely large heavenly body but as a large lamp, or mirror. Van Mastricht notes the Cartesian theory that the language of the Bible has to do with appearance only.⁶¹ On this test, Calvin, the Calvinists, and the Cartesians do not seem to be far apart. To say that the moon is literally a great lamp or reflector, that its greatness is not its physical mass but its role as a proximate source of light, is surely accommodated language by comparison with those occasions in Scripture when heavenly bodies are referred to in more straightforwardly physical terms.⁶² However, even if there is convergence over Genesis 1: 16, orthodox Reformed theologians were not prepared to state, as a matter of principle, that the Bible only deals with how things appear, not how they are in fact.

However, this is not all that is to be said. In Cartesianism, and those individuals influenced by Descartes, such as Wittich, the Calvinian emphasis on accommodation as a mode of gracious divine representation to us of the divine mysteries and of the physical world in at least some of its aspects, and even the recognition that in general Scripture is written in the language of common appearance, becomes transmuted. 'Accommodation' comes to be employed as a more general rationale for the presence of common errors in Scripture, even the presence of such errors in Christ's own teaching. For this reason a term that had been characteristic of Calvin tended to become a source of conflict in the later seventeenth century.⁶³

Descartes's method of doubt itself raised alarm in the minds of Reformed theologians, most of whom came to regard it as avowedly

⁵⁹ Goudriaan 134 8.

⁶⁰ *Comm.* Gen. 1: 16.

⁶¹ Goudriaan 140 1.

⁶² For example, references to Orion and the Pleiades in Job 9: 5 and 38: 31, and Amos 5: 8.

⁶³ Goudriaan 133 ff. See also Martin I. Klauber and Glenn S. Sunshine, 'Jean Alphonse Turretini on Biblical Accommodation: Calvinist or Socinian?', *Calvin Theological Journal*, 25/1 (1990), 7 27, and Stephen D. Benin, *The Footprints of God* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1993), ch. 8.

atheistic, since its starting point was universal doubt, including doubt as to the existence of God, and even the cogency of cosmological arguments. This flew in the face of the Calvinian appeal to the innateness of the *sensus divinitatis*, and seemed to put a basic commitment to the existence of God at risk. But, as we have noted, it is possible to read Descartes's sceptical procedure in different ways. For example, it can be regarded as a mental discipline, a purging of the mind, rules for the direction of the mind, rather than as an initial and avowed commitment to atheism. (There is evidence in some of Descartes's texts to suggest this.) Or, as with Turretin, its remit can be restricted. Or it can be a way of establishing an indubitable premise from which to establish the existence of God.

Perhaps the best way to try to frame an answer to such questions, though, is by reference to Calvin himself. Calvin had said that in our pursuit of the knowledge of God it does not matter much whether we start from the manward or Godward side, though in fact he preferred the Godward. Descartes could be understood as proceeding from the manward side, albeit in the taut, theoretical style of Cartesian epistemology. In any case, Descartes was clear that establishing the existence of God 'forms the foundation of his metaphysics',⁶⁴ and perhaps it could be thought churlish for a Reformed theologian to want more from any philosopher than that.

Finally, the Cartesian procedure of moving from the knowledge of the self to the knowledge of God might be thought of as a form of the reflexivity that is present in Augustine and explicit in Calvin; the knowledge of the self leads to the knowledge of God, not, in the case of Descartes, in the form of an immediate intuition, but via a simple discursive proof. In this case, as in much philosophy, the knowledge in question is not the rich, affective Calvinian conception of knowledge. It is not even a necessary condition of such knowledge, but the knowledge of clarity and distinctness and, in Descartes's own case, knowledge that is incorrigible. But this is surely knowledge which is consistent with the richer, Calvinian concept and which, if it is available, is worth having. It could even be seen as a way of getting as clear as one can be regarding the *sensus divinitatis*, of showing that it is self-refuting to deny the *sensus*, since it reinstates itself as an immediate consequence of the fact of self-awareness.

What of mechanism? A theologian could perhaps hold at a distance a developed account of physical natures of things. Why should there be a theological obligation to provide a philosophically watertight account of scriptural statements regarding physical nature? So maybe, at least on

⁶⁴ *Philosophical Works*, i. 81.

mechanism, Descartes could be kept at arm's length. But occasionalism is more serious. It is the idea of the loss of creaturely sources of efficient causation that seems to have most concerned Voetius. For it might be possible to give an account of divine conservation which conserves inert types of material objects which provide different kinds of material causes, although Voetius himself does not appear to have countenanced this. In producing the efficient causes of changes in physical objects in occasionalistic fashion, God might thereby produce different kinds of changes according to the different natures of the material objects. The one efficient cause might produce varieties of material cause depending on the different arrangements of matter. It is not clear that this would have satisfied Voetius. For one thing, he might have held that this state of affairs would make God the author of sin. But, as we will see in Chapter 8, to preserve creatures with intrinsic powers Aristotelianism is not necessary, for Stoicism would suffice.

Let us reflect on the reasons for thinking that an earlier association between Descartes and Reformed theology that we are speculating about could *not* have happened. To begin with, Descartes has a conception of wisdom as equivalent to the accumulation of knowledge which is at odds with Calvin's view (and of course, with Augustine's).⁶⁵ Here he seems to forget his genuflections in the direction of Augustine's theology in his prefatory remarks to his *Meditations* addressed to the doctors of the Sorbonne. Not only does he separate theology and philosophy; as we have noted, he thinks of theology in fairly fideistic terms which help him to conclude that knowledge is only achievable on the basis of appropriate philosophical foundations, and that what is not based on such foundations is not worthy to be regarded as knowledge. As we have also seen, Calvin lauds secular knowledge, but nevertheless he sees it as subordinate to the knowledge of God and of ourselves drawn from Christ. And although he claims the highest kind of certainty for the teaching of Scripture, he is not at all sensitive to the crucial Cartesian point, that it is both necessary and possible to have knowledge that withstands the challenge of total scepticism, and to base all other knowledge claims upon such a foundation.

Although Calvin seeks religious certainty, and believes that he has gained it, this is grounded not in philosophical argument but in supernaturalism, in an appeal to the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. Otherwise I reckon that Calvin is fairly Aristotelian about the degree of certainty

⁶⁵ *Philosophical Works*, i. 204.

necessary and possible in the case of ‘things below’, as he is in his externalist arguments for the divinity and authority of Scripture. He may well have thought that no person can wish for more certainty than we have from the ordinary operations of the senses and the intellect and that ‘Holy Spirit certainty’ is at least as sure as that.⁶⁶

Second, Calvin is resolutely theocentric in all aspects of his thought, including of course his epistemology. A fundamental theological role is played by the *sensus divinitatis*. By contrast, in Descartes, as has frequently been remarked, (philosophically speaking) God plays second fiddle to the human self, in that the sceptic-immune knowledge that God exists follows only from the sceptic-immune knowledge that I exist. Nevertheless, although Descartes is not *ab initio* theocentric, he does have an exceedingly strong account of divine sovereignty, though he recognizes that whilst we can have a clear and distinct idea of such a transcendent deity his will is nonetheless inscrutable:

The mathematical truths which you call eternal have been laid down by God and depend on Him entirely no less than the rest of his creatures. Indeed, to say that these truths are independent of God is to talk of Him as if He were Jupiter or Saturn and to subject Him to the Styx and the Fates.⁶⁷

Although the existence of God may be the foundation of metaphysics, it is not itself a legitimate object of metaphysical enquiry.

Calvin of course does not discuss this precise question. But he has a strong doctrine of divine simplicity, and an abhorrence of theological voluntarism, and he gives priority to the secret yet all-just decree of God. However, he is highly sensitive to the presence of self-contradiction in thought about God, though he understands this in a pre-Cartesian fashion. It seems natural that we should think of him on Thomistic lines, that God himself embodies the principles of reasoning, including the basic laws of logic, in his own essential nature. So this is certainly a substantial difference between Calvin and Descartes.

Coupled with this is Descartes’s perfect-being methodology, as exemplified in his version of the ontological argument for God’s existence in the fifth Meditation, for example. This a priori approach to the nature of God is at odds with Calvin’s more a posteriori approach: an understanding of the nature of God directed by God’s revelation to us in Scripture. Calvin would not, of course, deny that God is perfect, and, as we will see in Chapter 6, there are aspects of Calvin’s thought that are decidedly

⁶⁶ For discussion of this point in Calvin see Helm, *John Calvin’s Ideas*, 257–8.

⁶⁷ Descartes, letter to Mersenne, 15 April 1630. (See also letters to Mersenne of 6 and 17 May 1630.)

Anselmic. Nonetheless, there is little evidence of him using the idea of perfection as a method or principle of theological reasoning, as with Anselm or Descartes. These are important methodological differences, to be sure, but they may not give rise to very significant material differences as far as their respective theologies are concerned.

Perhaps even more important is Descartes's Pelagianism. Writing after Descartes's death, his Jansenist friend and sponsor Antoine Arnauld says:

I find it strange that this good monk [Desgabets] takes M. Descartes for a very enlightened man of religion; whereas his letters are full of Pelagianism, and apart from the points of which he was persuaded by his philosophy, such as the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, the best that can be said of him is that he seems always to have submitted to the church.⁶⁸

Menn attempts to head this off by distinguishing, as many do, between a *de Libero Arbitrio* Augustine and an anti-Pelagian Augustine.⁶⁹ But even if Arnauld is correct, Descartes's account of the will is not simply Pelagian. His metaphysical view of the indeterministic power of the human will—a thesis not altogether convincingly drawn from the clear and distinct ideas of his epistemology—is notoriously extravagant. One cannot imagine Calvin having much time for that.

One might try to minimize the difference between the two in the following way, however. It might be argued that any account of the Fall (Calvin's included⁷⁰) requires the postulating of free will in some sense, and that Descartes's free-will theodicy for the presence of error (in *Meditations* IV and VI, for example) is only an extreme form of this, an account of our epistemic fallenness in terms of the excessive exercise of our libertarian freedom. In other words, one might attempt a distinction between Descartes's metaphysical doctrine of the liberty of indifference and his Pelagian estimate of the moral and spiritual powers of the will, and allow him the first, on philosophical grounds, while disallowing him the second, on theological grounds.⁷¹

One must, after all, keep these things in perspective. Calvin frequently cites Plato and Aristotle and the Stoics with approval, sometimes with enthusiasm, and utilizes aspects of their philosophy in a rather eclectic way. At the same time he thinks that (especially in moral and spiritual matters) they are 'blinder than moles'. If he is prepared to exercise this

⁶⁸ Quoted in Menn, *Descartes and Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 70 n. 46.

⁶⁹ Menn 70.

⁷⁰ *Inst.* I.15.8.

⁷¹ Arnauld seems to attempt something like this, as reported by Menn (232–3, 327, 330–1).

degree of discrimination in the case of pagan philosophers, then why not a similar degree of discrimination in the case of a philosopher such as Descartes?

But what of the similarities between the outlook of Calvin and Descartes—the credit side of the ledger, so to speak? We have noted already that each shares a formal, and to some extent a material, coincidence in Augustinianism. Each thinks that the knowledge of God and the soul are foundational and crucial—Calvin for true religion, Descartes for true philosophy. Then we have seen that Calvin has a place for philosophy, and for the arts and sciences, as part of his general intellectual outlook. So in so far as Descartes is propounding his philosophy merely as a starting point for investigating the sciences in such a way as to provide assured results, it is hard to see that Calvin could object to such a project, either to the spirit or to the letter of it.

Further still, as we will see in Chapter 9, Calvin shares with Descartes one important metaphysical position, a pronounced body–soul dualism, and a distaste for Aristotelian views of the self. Indeed, given this, it is rather surprising that despite the generally eclectic approach to philosophy among the Reformed, many of those theologians who followed Calvin reverted to some version of Aristotelianism, or hylomorphic dualism, when the precedent of Calvin himself surely points in the direction of a more Platonistic view of the self.⁷²

Another doctrine that Calvin and Descartes have in common is some version of innate ideas, as is evidenced in Calvin's view of the *sensus divinitatis*, which he regards as a natural, though presently perverted, endowment of the soul, and, in the case of Descartes, in his rationalism. But of course the *sensus divinitatis* is not a clear and distinct idea, and, while it may be a theological starting point for Calvin's religious epistemology, as it is in modern 'Reformed' epistemology, it is not the philosophical starting point for everything, as innate ideas are for Descartes.⁷³

Finally, although Descartes was accused of Pelagianism, and as we have noted has a very strong libertarian view of the human will, and Calvin is broadly compatibilistic, nevertheless the thought of each falls into the following pattern: each sees error as arising not directly from the creating and sustaining activity of God but from the human will—though in the case of Calvin not exclusively so. In Calvin, the effect of this willing is due

⁷² Voetius was scandalized by Descartes's dualism because it threatens the idea of the human being as an individual substance, for it treats a human being as an *ens per accidens* (Van Ruler 186).

⁷³ For a discussion of the relation between Calvin and 'Reformed' epistemology see Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas*, 218–19.

to God's inscrutable decreeing of 'mutable' creatures and his unwillingness to preserve them in their original integrity. For while Descartes appears to hold that the power of the human will could not be greater than it is, nevertheless simple freedom of indifference, he says, is 'the lowest grade of liberty'. The more a person acts in accordance with 'the reasons of the good and the true', or acts as a result of how God disposes one's 'inward thought', the more freedom a person possesses. 'Both divine grace and natural knowledge, far from diminishing my liberty, rather increase it and strengthen it.'⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the power of the human will could not be greater than it is, and error is due to its overweening power, its innate tendency to overreach itself. This makes it seem that error is essential to human nature, not contingent, as it is for Calvin and Augustine. However, both Calvin and Descartes charge error to the human and not to the divine will—for even though (for Calvin) God decrees evil, he is not thereby the author of it—and not to some essential limitation in God (as with Manichaeism), and so they may broadly be said to inhabit an Augustinian world. One could even argue that as regards responsibility for the entrance of sin they are both more or less in the same boat.

So I don't think the idea of a more general, positive reception of Descartes by the Reformed is wild. It is hard to see the prospect of a Reformed Cartesianism parallel to the Reformed Aristotelianism of Voetius. But Calvin's stance is sufficiently elastic as regards philosophy to permit an eclectic approach, and that is what, to varying degrees, ensued within Reformed Orthodoxy. From what we have learned about the reception of Descartes, such eclecticism might well have incorporated elements of his epistemology—scepticism, the knowledge of God and soul—and his metaphysics, including his account of body and soul, and elements of his doctrine of God, so that Cartesianism could form a significant element in a Reformed eclecticism, much more widespread than in fact it did. Even Descartes's interest in science could have motivated an investigation of the natural world and its integration with theology, even if his specific, mechanical doctrines are regarded as alien to Christianity. That's probably as far as it is reasonable to venture.

⁷⁴ *Philosophical Works*, i. 175.

Scripture, Reason, and Grace

IN this chapter we will consider Calvin's views on the interplay of Scripture, human reason, and faith by first looking at a representative medieval view, that of Thomas Aquinas, and then at Calvin's own view. We will see that Calvin's doctrine is an interesting mix of the pneumatic and the rational, and centres on his famous appeal to the self-authenticating character of Scripture. The internal testimony of the Holy Spirit upon the internal *indicia* of the Bible together provide very strong evidence that it is indeed the word of God.

Our attention will then be fixed on the fate of this doctrine of the internal testimony in the Reformed tradition. We will consider two different contexts in which Calvin's account of Spirit-given testimony to the divine authority of Holy Scripture, 'gracious certainty' as I will call it, is contested and also defended by later Calvinists. In the first of these, the discussion of it by Pierre Bayle (1647–1706) in the context of his advocacy of religious toleration, it is the objective certainty of the Reformed doctrine (and of other competing accounts of religious authority) which is called into question. The second context is that afforded by the published correspondence between the Westminster divine Antony Tuckney (1599–1670) and his former student the Cambridge Platonist Benjamin Whichcote (1609–83). Here it is the place of reason in relation to Scripture which is debated. In contrast to Whichcote's appeal to human reason as the foundation of theology, Tuckney seeks to uphold the Calvinian view that Scripture is not against reason, though it is not evidenced by unaided reason, but by word and Spirit together.

THOMAS ON SCRIPTURE AND FAITH

Unlike the *Institutes*, there is not a separate *locus* on Holy Scripture in the *Summa Theologiae*, or elsewhere, and so one has to look in other places for Thomas Aquinas's views on Scripture. In the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, generally regarded as a work in apologetics, Thomas makes a basic distinction between those truths that are attainable by reason alone, and

those which are above reason though not *against* reason, but which only divine wisdom reveals to men.¹ Both types of truths may be fittingly proposed for belief. But how are we to identify the presence of truths above reason, those that exceed purely naturally acquired knowledge? Thomas's answer is that the divine Wisdom 'reveals its own presence, as well as the truth of its teaching and inspiration, by fitting arguments.'² This suggests that on the one hand the divine wisdom is self-presenting, while on the other hand, and in addition, it is susceptible of a more discursive defence. Such arguments are in turn confirmed by 'visible manifestation to works that surpass the ability of all nature.'³ The argument here is either that only events that are supernatural can provide confirmatory evidence for the arguments concerning truths above reason, or that such events are fitting or appropriate to mark the presence of truths above reason. What are these events?

There are the wonderful cures of illnesses, there is the raising of the dead, and the wonderful immutation in the heavenly bodies, and what is more wonderful, there is the inspiration given to human minds, so that simple and untutored persons, filled with the gift of the Holy Spirit, come to possess instantaneously the highest wisdom and the readiest eloquence.⁴

From what Thomas goes on to say, the efficacy of these arguments is not simply that of historical testimony, but they are accompanied by some kind of supernatural assistance to the minds of those who receive them to accept the truths of the faith that accompany them, and particularly the fact that it involves seeking what is invisible and the curbing of the pleasures of the flesh. Assenting in these circumstances 'is the greatest of miracles . . . a manifest work of divine inspiration', a work that was foretold in the books of the prophets. The 'wonderful conversion of the world', being a greater miracle than those that accompanied the giving of the revelation, means that such miracles need not continue, though sometimes they do.⁵

A good place to gain further understanding of Aquinas's view of the acceptance of Scripture is in his treatment of faith. So it will help us if we glance at this in *Summa Theologiae* IIa 2ae 6.

Thomas here discusses how faith arises. One of its causes is the presence of something that is fit for belief. But Aquinas is here more concerned with

¹ *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I: *God*, trans. Anton C. Pegis as *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith* (New York: Image, 1955), i. 3.

² *Contra Gentiles*, I. 6.

³ *Contra Gentiles*, I. 6.

⁴ *Contra Gentiles*, I. 6.

⁵ *Contra Gentiles*, I. 6.

the efficient cause of faith, from where power to assent to the object of faith arises. His answer is that ‘God is necessarily the cause of faith. The reason: the things of faith surpass man’s understanding and so become part of his knowledge only because God reveals them.’⁶ The activity of God at this point is not like the inspiration of a prophet or apostle, however. It takes two forms. One is what Thomas calls persuasion from without; that is, from the external *indicia* of Holy Scripture such as the occurrence of a miracle. But witnessing a miracle is not by itself sufficient to promote assent to what the miracle witnesses to. This is shown by the fact that two people may witness the same miracle and one may assent, the other not. ‘Another kind of cause must therefore be present, an inner cause, one that influences a person inwardly to assent to the things of faith.’⁷ This is not an act of unaided free will, but

in assenting to the things of faith a person is raised above his own nature, he has this assent from a supernatural source influencing him; this source is God. The assent of faith, which is its principal act, therefore, has as its cause God, moving us inwardly through grace . . . A person’s will needs to be prepared by God through his grace in order to be lifted up to what surpasses nature, as we have shown.⁸

Summarizing, there is a mix of Scripture, grace, and reason in both accounts in Thomas. While some weight is given to arguments for the probable truth of Holy Scripture, and for the authoritativeness of the Church, considerably more weight, decisive weight in fact, is assigned to God’s effective preparation of the will, and the self-presenting character of divine wisdom. By this preparation there is a divinely given intuitive recognition of the God-giveness and therefore the authority of the ‘things of faith’, the propositional objects of assent, supernatural revelation. We might think of these two elements as the intuitive and the discursive, combining together.

We will see that Calvin follows essentially the same pattern, though of course with emphases that are distinctive of the Reformation.

CALVIN, SCRIPTURE, AND FAITH

The character of the *Institutes* as a work of Reformation theology is highlighted by the prominence that Calvin gives to the doctrine of Scripture,

⁶ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia 2ae 6.

⁷ *Summa Theologiae*, IIa 2ae 6.

⁸ *Summa Theologiae*, IIa 2ae 6.

underscoring his view that its authority is logically prior to that of the Church, and that its authoritativeness is evidenced principally to individuals. Calvin and the Reformers object to the medieval idea of faith as mere assent; nonetheless, what (for Aquinas) faith assents to is God's revelation in Scripture alone. As is evident from the structure of the *Institutes*, Calvin thinks of confidence in Scripture as the primal act of faith. Christian faith is faith in God's word and especially faith in God's promise. Though their accounts of faith vary in emphasis, then, for both Thomas and Calvin the content of faith, its propositional content, is Holy Scripture, and each of their accounts has elements of both an intuitive and a discursive character.

As we have noted, Calvin famously grounded acceptance of the authority of Scripture in the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. Although he believed that there are arguments that make it probable that Scripture has divine authority, these arguments are inferior to the fact that the grace of the Holy Spirit testifies in the mind and heart of the believer to the internal evidence of Scripture's God-giveness. The confidence that such internal testimony produces is, according to Calvin, simply an aspect, though a chief and foundational aspect, of the life of faith, a life which is (as with Thomas) supernaturally induced. God the Holy Spirit gives faith, and faith characteristically has special regard to, and relies upon, the promises of God as recorded in Scripture. Such explicit faith is an expression of a deeper disposition, a conviction wrought in the hearts and minds of believers that what Scripture teaches is in truth the word of God.

Let it therefore be held as fixed, that those who are inwardly taught by the Holy Spirit acquiesce implicitly in Scripture; that Scripture, carrying its own evidence along with it, deigns not to submit to proofs and arguments, but owes the full conviction with which we ought to receive it to the testimony of the Spirit. Enlightened by him, we no longer believe, either on our own judgment or that of others, that the Scriptures are from God; but in a way superior to human judgment, feel perfectly assured—as much so as if we beheld the divine image visibly impressed on it—that it came to us, by the instrumentality of men, from the very mouth of God.⁹

Calvin draws the contrast between human judgements (which are opinions) and the 'full conviction' which the Spirit's testimony brings, a testimony 'superior to human judgment.' This appeal to full conviction is clearly intended to outflank the Roman Catholic appeal to the councils and traditions of the Church as warranted interpreters of Holy Scripture.

⁹ *Inst.* I.7.5

It is meant to provide a sufficient reason for accepting a source of information as divinely inspired and so as utterly reliable. Under present circumstances that source is needed to supplement and clarify beliefs produced by the *sensus divinitatis*. Even where there are elements of implicit faith in the acceptance of Scripture, according to Calvin such faith is warranted by those parts or aspects of Scripture that provide clear cases of its teaching and hence of its divine origin. Calvin's stress on explicit faith and on the work of the Holy Spirit in engendering it are not found in Thomas.

Among the properties possessed by the beliefs that arise as a result of the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit are their objective certainty and their reasonableness. Being objectively certain implies that such a belief is not simply subjectively convincing but both objectively true and convincing. What could be more objective than the word of God, and what could be more reasonable, coming from the one who embodies wisdom and truth, even though much of what is revealed is beyond our full comprehension?

References to 'reason', 'rational', and 'reasonable' in this context should not be taken to herald the Enlightenment view of some external normative standard to which Scripture must (and does) conform in order to be credible. Rather, being an expression of divine wisdom, Scripture attains the highest standards of reason. Why Scripture is not universally taken to be the word of God, the highest wisdom, is because of human sin, and the darkening of the faculties of the mind as a consequence. Darkened minds do not, without special illumination, recognize the truth for what it is. They are blind, or badly sighted, and so recognize the truth in only a fitful and partial way and resist its advances. Nevertheless, the light shines. It takes the energy of the Holy Spirit to dispel such darkness and to enable the mind to discern the objective evidence. It is important to note, then, that in Calvin's view the work of the Holy Spirit is not to energize the will to take a leap of faith, but to open the eyes of the mind to see what is objectively there, present in the data of Holy Scripture, and to incline the will to accept it.

Calvin supplements this appeal to the internal testimony by referring to 'external proofs' similar to those noted earlier in Aquinas. However, he makes it clear that while such arguments supplement the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit to the cognitive content of Holy Scripture, they cannot supplant it, and in fact are epistemically inferior to it.

So what we find in Calvin is the basic pattern seen in Thomas Aquinas, though expressed more emphatically and prominently, and with a characteristically Calvinian emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart and mind of the believer. There are external and internal testimonies to the authority and truth of Holy Scripture. The internal testimonies are from

God himself and they produce faith in what he declares to us in Scripture. But in the case of Calvin there is a stress on the work of God the Holy Spirit, and on faith as involving not only *assensus* but also *fiducia*, reliance upon the promises of God, as the Holy Spirit convinces individual men and women that Scripture is God's special revelation. The crucial difference between Calvin's view of reliance upon Scripture and that of the medievals such as Thomas is that even God-induced faith is for Thomas merely assent to the teaching of Scripture as this is promoted by the Church. Faith may be largely implicit and is wholly a matter of assent. The difference between assent and faith as Calvin understood it can be expressed as follows. Assent is a necessary condition for faith, but it is essentially passive, the reception of evidence, of testimony. By contrast faith is active, it is an act of the will, an expression of reliance on what or who is believed. Faith and distrust may both involve assent. As faith involves delight, joy, relief in adhering to the object of faith, so distrust (of the very same state of affairs, maybe), involves distaste, loathing, or fear.¹⁰

This position, involving both internal and external testimonies, is inherently unstable. For Calvin (and for Thomas, though less emphatically), the authority of Scripture as God's word rests upon unequal foundations. The primary foundation is the Bible's self-certification, illuminated to the believing mind. This is individualistic and immediate, providing certainty. The second, the foundation of lesser importance, is the external *indicia*. These have an apologetic, defensive role, providing well-grounded opinions as to the trustworthiness and uniqueness of Scripture. The instability arises because the main foundation is solely the gift of God, granted or withheld at his discretion, and so a gift which cannot be institutionalized in the life of the Church. It is granted or withheld according to God's good pleasure. By contrast, the arguments from the external *indicia* can be institutionalized in the training of ministers and the teaching of congregations.

For Calvin, the appeal to the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, despite the objectivity and certainty that it is claimed to deliver, is strongly personal and individual, and the superior certainty and assurance that it provides that the teaching of the Bible is the very Word of God is not transmissible solely by human means to others who presently lack it. It comes from and is sustained by the immediately-given enlightening and assuring activity of God the Holy Spirit. This is an activity which, as

¹⁰ For a brief discussion of this difference see Paul Helm, *Faith With Reason* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 16–17.

Calvin himself takes pains to stress, is sovereign and free, ultimately due to God's sovereign election of some and his bypassing of others.

By contrast, the 'external proofs' which in Calvin's view are sufficient to support the *opinion* that the Bible is the Word of God, that is to establish that it is more probable than not that the Bible is the Word of God, are generally available. Calvin is clear that these are only of secondary importance. Yet such proofs have the advantage that they can be identified, written down, taught, and argued over. Calvin engages in all these activities in book I.8 of the *Institutes*. One can easily imagine the arguments, together with an assessment of their strengths and weaknesses, forming part of a theological curriculum. And by this means the influence of the arguments can be secured by purely naturalistic means, the usual ways of identifying and teaching and contesting any argument.

It is not difficult to imagine these two elements, which Calvin holds side by side in book I.7–8 of the *Institutes*, coming apart, and it is easy to envisage that in some groups generally in Calvin's shadow stress may fall on the one, the need for the personal, immediate work of the Spirit, while in other groups it may fall on the need to deploy and accept rational, persuasive arguments. At any rate it is easy to anticipate tension. We will now consider two different contexts in which such tension arose after Calvin.

METHODISM AND PARTICULARISM

In his influential discussion of the problem of the criterion in epistemology Roderick Chisholm distinguished between two approaches to the following two questions that are fairly central to any theory of knowledge. The first is 'What do we know; what is the extent of our knowledge?' and the second 'What are the criteria of knowledge; how are we to decide, in some particular case, whether we know?' Chisholm suggests that the two sorts of questions may be connected in that if we have an answer to one of them this may give us an answer to the other. For if we can identify criteria of knowledge, they may tell us how much we know. Or if we are able to identify things that we know, then we may be able to develop a criterion of knowledge. But if we don't have an answer to one of these questions then we may not be able to make headway in answering the other.¹¹

Those who think we can first have an answer to the first type of question Chisholm called 'methodists', for they believe they have an epistemological

¹¹ *Theory of Knowledge* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1988), ch. 4.

method or criterion which they can confidently apply to areas of enquiry. Those who think we may first have an answer to the second type of question are ‘particularists’, starting their epistemological enquiries from particular instances of knowledge, and attempting to build an account of knowledge from these. Descartes’s appeal to the ‘clear and distinct’ ideas of reason or Locke’s appeal to ‘ideas of sense’ are each ‘methodist’ in their approach to the problems of epistemology. Chisholm cites Thomas Reid (1710–96) and G. E. Moore (1873–1958) as ‘particularists.’

So Reid ‘takes it for granted’ that he thinks, remembers, and reasons. A person may, by attentive reflection, which is a kind of intuition, have clear and certain knowledge of the operations of his mind; everyone has an irresistible conviction of his continued existence over time. These are among the particular objects of certain knowledge, for which it is absurd to seek a proof, but which it is inevitable that we believe. So any ‘disproof’ of any of these must carry less conviction than what it is a disproof of, since in many cases such a ‘disproof’ would rely upon the very matters for which a disproof is being sought, such as memory and reason.¹² Likewise with convictions respecting minds other than one’s own. ‘Our social intellectual operations, as well as our social affections, appear very early in life, before we are capable of reasoning; yet both suppose a conviction of the existence of other intelligent beings.’¹³

Using this Chisholmian template, we might think that on the question of religious knowledge, the knowledge of God, Calvin is very definitely a particularist. For it may seem that what I earlier called a sufficient reason for gracious certainty is not meant as an epistemological criterion, not even a criterion in the area of religious knowledge, as the idea of a criterion is understood by Chisholm and the tradition of discussion going back to ancient times. Calvin does not first attempt to establish a method of enquiry or a general set of criteria for what is to count as knowledge, but instead he provides one instance or paradigm of such knowledge: God’s Spirit-illuminated revelation of himself in Holy Scripture.

But is this in fact correct? For of course it would be possible to have a criterion which only one particular possible source of knowledge met, just as ‘the moon’ is the only thing to meet the description ‘natural satellite of the earth.’ We possess a method for detecting satellites of the earth, and we have discovered that the moon is the only such satellite. Perhaps, in a similar way, what Calvin is saying is that there is a method for identifying

¹² Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785), i. II.

¹³ Reid, *Essays*, i. VIII.

sources of divine knowledge, and that there is only one instance where that method is usable.

But this cannot be correct either. For the character of Calvin's discussion seems quite foreign to the idea of first identifying and then using a 'method.' He nowhere implies, as part of his doctrine of gracious certainty, that God has disclosed or imparted a method which we are able to use, to check out various ostensible sources of religious knowledge and to enable us to identify the genuine or authentic source, employing it in the case of various *prima facie* candidates for revelation—The Bible, the Koran, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, and so on. His discussion of gracious certainty is couched in much more immediate terms than these—that by the work of the Holy Spirit we are granted an intuition or illumination, a kind of instinct or gut feeling, that by virtue of what the Bible says and claims we are assured that this document is from the very mouth of God, inspired by him and carrying his authority.

Of course besides this there is the subordinate approach which we identified earlier. This might reasonably be called a 'method'; namely, the method of employing external *indicia*. Such a procedure is undoubtedly 'methodist' in its flavour, as can be seen from the opening words of Calvin's discussion in book I.8.

In vain were the authority of Scripture fortified by argument, or supported by the consent of the Church, or confirmed by any other helps, if unaccompanied by an assurance higher and stronger than human judgment can give.¹⁴

Here are arguments, the testimony of the Church, and various 'helps' combined in a cumulative case against objections to the divine authority of Scripture. It is not hard to think of a way that such appeals might be formulated into a 'method.' This, for example, might be one suggestion.

(M) It is reasonable to believe that whatever (M) can be supported by suitable arguments, and by the authority of the Church, is a revelation of God.

But, as we have stressed, such a method, if that is what it is, is for Calvin subordinate to the more immediate, personal work of the Holy Spirit illuminating the content of Scripture and showing thereby that it is the authentic word of God. When Calvin says that 'our faith in doctrine is not established until we have a perfect conviction that God is its author',¹⁵ or 'Such, then, is a conviction which asks not for reasons; such a knowledge which accords with the highest reason, namely, knowledge in which the

¹⁴ *Inst.* I.8.1.

¹⁵ *Inst.* I.7.4.

mind rests more firmly and securely than in any reasons; such in fine, the conviction which revelation from heaven alone can produce,¹⁶ he is making the claim that Scripture provides us with certain knowledge of what it affirms. It is the awareness of the cognitive content of Scripture that is a necessary condition of providing us with the conviction that this is the word of God, and hence with God-given knowledge.

It is not as if Calvin has a general test for what is to count as divine authority and then discovers that in fact only one candidate meets this test, namely Holy Scripture. Rather, he starts from Scripture, and what it means, and how, under the influence of the Spirit, its divine character is immediately borne in upon us as we become acquainted with its content. And, in any case, as far as 'proofs' are concerned, since (as he stresses) they are of subordinate importance, they ought only to make their entrance in a situation in which the mind is already imbued by the Spirit with a certainty that is higher and stronger than any human judgement, and then only for apologetic purposes. At best they provide a subordinate criterion, one that should never become a rival of the superior, Spirit-imparted gracious certainty.

So this certain knowledge has an intuitive aspect. It is not worked out; or at least it does not have its authority in virtue of being worked out. It is not so much a conclusion as a premise. Calvin contrasts it with 'comprehension, such as that which we have of things falling under human sense.'¹⁷ Suppose that someone has 'good taste' in furniture or decoration. This may not be because she has undergone training in design, but rather because she has an instinctive feel for what will 'go' in a room, colours and patterns and proportions, and what would be hideous. She may not know what lies at the basis of her choice, what gives it its rationale; nevertheless, she has a set of firmly held convictions about what will go together in a room that is displayed in the rooms she designs and by people who have been educated in the principles of design. For Calvin, the utter certainty and conviction that attends the reading of Scripture may be more like convictions of such an intuitive kind than a learned skill—an intuition that he believes is instilled into the mind by God the Holy Spirit, an intuition not so much innate as acquired.

So this paradigm has two features. First, there is the purely formal aspect, utter certainty, complete conviction, of a fairly intuitive kind. This is, according to Calvin, a case of knowledge. If A is convinced in this fashion of the truth of *p*, then it follows that *p* is true and that A knows

¹⁶ *Inst.* I.7.5.

¹⁷ *Inst.* III.2.14.

it. If A is convinced with Holy Spirit certainty then he knows that p , and it follows that p is true; it may even follow that he knows that he knows that p . He may have an assurance that what he certainly believes is true, an assurance that is also God-given, 'a thorough conviction that, in holding it, [he holds] unassailable truth.'¹⁸

Second, there is a strongly cognitive feature. What the Holy Spirit brings to the mind with conviction is an awareness of the distinctive cognitive content of Scripture—truth of the highest reason and wisdom. It follows that a source of information which denied that content, or which was seriously at odds with it, could not be known with certainty, but only 'known' with 'certainty', where the quotation marks indicate that any claim to such knowledge is merely a feeling of certainty or conviction lacking truth-entailment.

So Scripture is at present the unique source of the knowledge and wisdom of God (here I am purposely omitting discussion of Calvin's understanding of the *sensus divinitatis*), and it alone conveys that knowledge, or may convey it, through the help of the Holy Spirit, with utter certainty and conviction. These two features, the certainty feature and the uniqueness feature, together combine to provide the two components of Calvin's particularistic account of the knowledge of God. They are components, not general criteria; Calvin is a particularist, not a methodist, not even a Calvinistic methodist.

We now turn to consider two instances of the tendency of the two distinctive features of Calvin's particularism to come apart.

PIERRE BAYLE

Pierre Bayle was a Calvinist with a sharp philosophical mind. For a time he was Professor of Philosophy at the Protestant Academy of Sedan, and suffered persecution as a Huguenot at the hands of the French authorities. The Academy of Sedan was abolished by royal decree in 1681, and he fled to Holland, becoming Professor of Philosophy at the *Ecole Illustre* in Rotterdam until he was relieved of his post in 1693. He worked first on *A Philosophical Commentary on These Words of the Gospel, Luke 14: 23, 'Compel Them to Come In, That My House May Be Full'* (1686–8), which we will shortly consider, and then on his famous *Dictionary*. On the evidence provided by the *Dictionary*, the publication of which began in

¹⁸ *Inst.* I.7.5.

1695, Bayle is often regarded as an epistemological sceptic and as a forerunner of the Enlightenment.

Certainly, whether or not he intended it, he was a forerunner of the Enlightenment, and in what follows we will encounter some of the evidence for this. But there is no reason to doubt his own word that he was not a sceptic, nor good reason to doubt that he retained his Calvinist convictions throughout his life, even though they may have undergone something of a modification as a result of his experiences of persecution and of his advocacy of religious toleration. In this section we will be concerned with some of the epistemological underpinnings of his defence of religious toleration, and the way in which they connected with his religious epistemology, though we will not be concerned with the issue of toleration itself.

From Bayle's massive defence of toleration I will concentrate on two issues. First, his appeal to the criterion in epistemology; and then his response to the invocation of divine grace when this is offered as a counter-argument to the deployment of his criterion.

In the case of Bayle matters are sharply different from what we have found in Calvin. Unlike the situation that prevailed in Calvin's Geneva, with a close alliance between the magistrate and the Reformed Church, in his *Philosophical Commentary* Bayle is arguing at length for the toleration of religious beliefs, of any and all of those religious beliefs which do not threaten the integrity of the state and of its practice of toleration.¹⁹ In the course of covering many arguments against toleration, he considers the view of those who argue as follows: If A knows some truth T, then he is entitled to suppress the expression of the views of those who deny T, since, being false, the denial of T is not worthy of belief. For since A knows the truth, those who differ from A must fail to know it, and be in error, and their views are therefore not worth considering and so not worth public expression. So to express them would be to engage in the dissemination of falsehood.

Bayle represents those who would not tolerate the expression of significant religious beliefs which they held to be false in the following terms:

We speak in the Cause of Truth, and therefore are allow'd to exercise Violence on Delinquents; but false Religions have no such Privilege, such Methods in them

¹⁹ It is worth noting that Calvin explicitly endorsed the use that Augustine made of Luke 14: 23 in defence of persecution. 'I do not disapprove of the use which Augustine frequently made of this passage against the Donatists, to prove that godly princes may lawfully issue edicts, for *compelling* obstinate and rebellious persons to worship the true God, and to maintain the unity of the faith; for, though faith is voluntary, yet we see that such methods are useful for subduing the obstinacy of those who will not yield until they are compelled' (*Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, II.173).

would be downright *Barbarian Cruelty*; in us it's all Divine, being the Fruits of a holy Charity.²⁰

Standing alone, this argument, expressed with Bayle's characteristic sarcasm, may not be a very compelling argument for intolerance, since it might be held that those who differ from A are nonetheless (in virtue of some fact about their rights, or dignity, or whatever) entitled to hold false views and to express them. It may be held that from the fact that an opinion is not worth considering it does not follow that it may not be propounded for consideration. There is no evidence that Bayle believed that his opponents thought that intolerance was entailed by such an argument alone. Nevertheless, he takes this argument seriously, because it was taken seriously by his contemporaries, and (rather embarrassingly for him) by his Calvinist forbears in Geneva and elsewhere. In the course of his discussion he has interesting things to say about the criterion.²¹

Bayle claims that given our circumstances as human beings—many of us lack the time, or the intelligence, or the opportunity for scholarly reflection—the most that God expects of us is a diligent search for the truth, and the act of adopting the conclusions of what after a

sincere and faithful Inquiry, shall appear such to us, and of loving this apparent Truth, and of governing our selves by its Precepts how difficult soever they may seem. This imports, that Conscience is given us as a Touch-stone of Truth, the Knowledg and Love of which is injoin'd us. If you demand any thing further, it's plain you demand Impossibilitys; and 'tis easy to demonstrate it.²²

He points to general features of human life: that we grow up from infancy, we have bodily needs to be attended to, we work, we become tired and get old. Such general features of the human condition mean that we have limited time to consider religious questions. It follows that God is not obliging us to discover absolute truth but to search for 'reputed Truth' using conscience as its touchstone.²³

Here is an interesting and important shift away from Calvin. Underlying Bayle's argument is the assumption that opportunity limits ability and therefore limits responsibility. Our opportunities affect the degree of our

²⁰ *A Philosophical Commentary on These Words of the Gospel, Luke 14: 23, 'Compel Them to Come In, That My House May Be Full'* (1686 8; trans. London 1708), ed. with an introd. John Kilcullen and Chandran Kukathas (Indianapolis, Ind.: Liberty Fund, 2005), 127. (The editors have retained the style and spelling of the 1708 translation.)

²¹ Bayle 262 3.

²² Bayle 261.

²³ Bayle 261.

responsibility for holding the views we do, including our religious views. This is in sharp contrast to Calvin, who takes it as axiomatic that in general, and certainly in religion, opportunity does not limit responsibility. Or at least that inability (which is one kind of absence of opportunity) does not limit responsibility. In addition it is Calvin's conviction that through inalienable possession of the *sensus divinitatis*, even though it is in a warped and imperfect condition due to the Fall, we have some knowledge of God and we are responsible for making good use of it. So we are responsible if we reject God, because we have an innate knowledge of God which we do not make good use of.

In his discussion of ability and opportunity in connection with keeping the law Calvin emphatically denies that the law is the measure of our ability, and holds that our responsibility to keep the law is grounded not in our ability to do so but in our knowledge of the law, quoting with approval Paul's claim that 'Through the law comes knowledge of sin' (Rom. 3: 20).²⁴ This is part of the law—gospel dialectic that he shares with Luther, and which perhaps he took from him, though more likely from Augustine. The law makes demands upon us which we are unable to fulfil, even though we ought to fulfil them; awareness of this creates the conditions for despair in oneself and so for reliance upon the unmerited grace of God. We will discuss the issue of ability and opportunity more fully in Chapter 8.

By contrast, Bayle inhabits a different world, a world in which were developing the elements of religious pluralism among Christian societies. He welcomed this, and the relief that it brought and would bring from physical persecution. In such a world different groups may have different epistemic starting points and, Bayle believes, X cannot be held responsible for not having Y's starting point, and vice versa. So each is responsible for making the best use of his circumstances. Perhaps he need not take such a view, for he could stress equity and natural law, which we all have a sense of, just as Calvin stresses the products of the *sensus divinitatis* in us all. And perhaps also Calvin's thought could go some way to meet him, given Calvin's distinction between the 'things below' and the 'things above.'²⁵ For perhaps Calvin should argue that in regard to things below opportunity *does* limit ability. However, Bayle does not seem to address this Calvinian distinction.

Thinking of 'the Truths of Religion in particular',²⁶ Bayle claims that we cannot know certainly that what appears to us to be true is in fact true.

²⁴ *Inst.* II.5.6.

²⁵ *Inst.* II.2.13. See also III.19.15 and IV.20.2. The distinction will be discussed further in Chapter 10.

²⁶ Bayle 261.

We may be fully convinced that we possess the perfect truth, sure that we are not deceived and that others who differ from us are deceived, and so on. But these are, according to Bayle, ‘all equivocal Marks of Truth; because they are to be found in the very Pagans, and the most adandon’d Hereticks.’²⁷ In other words, we cannot use *our* convictions of certainty and truth to persecute because others would then be warranted in using *their* criteria of certainty and truth to persecute us. Thus ‘[a] Papist is as fully satisfy’d of the Truth of his Religion, a Turk of his, and a Jew of his, as we are of ours . . . In short, Man has no characteristick Mark to discern the Persuasion of the Truth from the Persuasion of a Lye.’²⁸ No characteristic mark: no criterion; that is, no publicly received and publicly certifiable criterion.

When Roman Catholics tax Calvinists with having left the Church and so having no infallible way of interpreting the Scripture, and the Calvinists answer ‘this Objection a thousand times over’,²⁹ nevertheless the Roman Catholics have a point if we suppose

as we commonly do, that God requires of Man the Knowledge of absolute Truth, exclusive of all apparent Truth, and requires his certainly knowing that he does know it. Let’s fairly own our mistake; neither Learned nor Ignorant can ever arrive at this by any methods of Search and Inquiry: for never will these methods lead us to the Criterion of Truth, which is an Idea so clear and distinct that we perceive that the thing cannot possibly be otherwise, after having fairly consider’d all the grounds of doubting, I mean all the Objections of an Adversary . . . We may have a moral certainty of this, and founded on very high Probability; but after all, this kind of Certainty may subsist in the Soul of one who is actually deceiv’d, and therefore is no infallible Character of Truth: This is not what we call *Criterion Veritatis*, that irresistible Evidence, whereby we know, for example, that the Whole is greater than its Part; that if from equal things we take things equal, the remainder will be equal; that six is half twelve etc.³⁰

Bayle here proposes a very strong, Cartesian criterion, of clear and distinct ideas. But perhaps a weaker criterion would serve the same purpose; say, ‘A knows that *p* if and only if the evidence for *p* is borne irresistibly into his mind such that he knows that he knows that *p*.’ Here irresistibility is part of the criterion of truth.

So the Roman Catholics have a point, but they themselves are in no better case than their opponents in pressing these difficulties

²⁷ Bayle 261 2.

²⁸ Bayle 262.

²⁹ Bayle 262.

³⁰ Bayle 263. The influence of Descartes’s clear and distinct ideas is apparent here.

because it's no less impossible for them to get over 'em by their Scheme, than for us by ours; and because they have no Expedient, upon their Principles, for satisfying that Condition which they suppose God exacts, to wit, the knowing from certain and undoubted Knowledg, that what they take for Truth is not an apparent Truth, such as all other Sects take for Truth, but Truth absolute and real.³¹

In fact, Bayle believes that the Roman Catholics are in a worse case, for not only is there the problem of Scripture, there is also the need to examine history 'in order to discover what is really an Apostolical Tradition from that which is only so in the vain Imagination of a Party.'³² This point echoes Calvin's view that the Roman Catholics' procedure in establishing their authority is a two-step rather than a one-step affair.

So (in Chisholm's terminology) Bayle is clearly some kind of methodist: he thinks that, in respect of religion, a criterion such as 'A knows that p if and only if the evidence for p is borne irresistibly into his mind such that he knows that he knows that p ' cannot be fulfilled. He thinks, it is fair to say, that such a claim is rather extravagant, and, because of the possibility of a *tu quoque* argument, that it is dialectically useless. As a consequence there is a public epistemic parity between the various sects and denominations, and it is easily seen how this claim of parity would fit snugly into a proposal for general toleration. Another way of approaching this would be to say that Bayle had a political sense that had been developed by situations in which citizens of the same country who were Catholics were failing to persuade by means that included coercion those who were Protestants of the superiority of their religion, as in the tragic events in France that unfolded in his lifetime. Understandably, perhaps, Calvin lacked such a political sense.

Incidentally, Bayle does not think that following his criterion of a sincere and faithful enquiry, of 'sincerely and honestly consult[ing] the Lights which God has afforded him',³³ is particularly easy to carry out. His opinion

saves not a Soul the more; because how innocent soever a Man may be with regard to his speculative Opinions, he sins often against Conscience, he does not perform what he believes it were fit he did, and what he knows wou'd be well-pleasing to that God whom he adores: and therefore without bringing those Modifications of his Soul, which were not conformable to absolute Truth, into the account at the Day of Judgment, God will find other criminal Modifications enough in it. Desires and Wills not conformable to the Idea he had of his moral

³¹ Bayle 263.

³² Bayle 263.

³³ Bayle 264.

Duty. Beside that there are Opinions enough to be answer'd for, which grow up with us either thro' inexcusable Sloth, or Sensuality; which Opinions I'm far from excepting out of the number of punishable Transgressions.³⁴

So the criterion of (socially) acceptable or tolerable opinion is not 'Whatever I sincerely believe is acceptable' but 'Whatever I sincerely believe after having fully discharged my duty of enquiry is acceptable and ought to be tolerated.' Nonetheless, given what Bayle has said regarding the competing commitments a person may have, he certainly believes that it is possible to discharge this duty, though a failure to discharge it is difficult to detect.

As a consequence of this pluralist epistemology, blasphemy, for example, is not for Bayle an offence against one particular orthodox religion established by law, but against a person's own religion. As he says,

if a Christian, who believes not a Trinity, and is persuaded in his erroneous Conscience, that there cannot be three Persons each of which is God without there being three Gods, says and maintains that the God of the Catholicks and of the Protestants is a false God, a contradictory God, etc. this is not blaspheming with regard to him, because he speaks not against that Divinity which he acknowledges, but against another which he disowns.³⁵

From all this one might think that despite what was said about him earlier Bayle is a sceptic. But this would be incorrect, at least on most understandings of what scepticism is. If scepticism is Pyrrhonic, if the correct epistemic attitude is suspense of judgement, then Bayle is certainly not a sceptic. For he is an advocate of enquiry, and he believes that enquiry may lead us to have well-established beliefs which we ought to act upon. Or if a sceptic is someone who holds that if p could be false then we ought never to believe that p is true, then Bayle is not a sceptic in this sense either. Though he does seem to hold, on the evidence of the criterion he proposed earlier, that if p could be false then we can never know that p , a criterion he may have derived from the 'new philosophy', Cartesianism. But how can he be a sceptic if he has the religious convictions of a Calvinist Christian, and holds that in more general matters probability is the guide to life? Here is a representative passage:

God forbid I shou'd have a thought of stretching the Rights of natural Reason; or of the Principles of Metaphysicks, to such a length as your *Socinians*, who pretend that all Sense given to Scripture, not agreeable to this Reason or to these Principles, is to be rejected; and who in virtue of this Maxim refuse to believe the Trinity and Incarnation. No, this I can't come up to, without boundary and limitation . . . the

³⁴ Bayle 266.

³⁵ Bayle 216. Perhaps Bayle has Socinians in mind here.

whole Body of Divines, of what Party soever, after having cry'd up Revelation, the Meritoriousness of Faith, and Profoundness of Mysterys, till they are quite out of breath, come to pay their homage at last at the Footstool of the Throne of Reason, and acknowledg, tho they won't speak out (but their Conduct is a Language expressive and eloquent enough) That Reason, speaking to us by the Axioms of natural Light, or metaphysical Truths, is the supreme Tribunal, and final Judge without Appeal of whatever's propos'd to the human Mind.³⁶

Here we must distinguish Bayle's own personal opinion regarding Socinianism, and the right of Socinians in his view to hold and peacefully propagate their views. He resolutely rejects Socinianism but would allow others the opportunity to accept it. Reason (understood as logical reasoning) and basic metaphysical principles are among the necessary conditions for the acceptance of the mysteries of the faith. No one, of whatever party, is ready to accept as a divine mystery whatever entails a self-contradiction. At this point Bayle is certainly going no further in the direction of rationalism than Calvin himself³⁷—though he is, of course, going much further in the direction of toleration than Calvin, and that's his point.

That Bayle is not a sceptic in his view of the natural light is clear given how he thinks that it is expressed in the judgements of the conscience:

Once more I say, Heavens forbid I shou'd have a thought of straining this Principle to such a degree as the *Socinians* do; yet I can't think, whatever Limitations it may admit with respect to speculative Truths, that it ought or can have any with regard to those practical and universal Principles which concern Manners; my meaning is, that all moral Laws, without exception, ought to be regulated by that natural Idea of Equity, which, as well as metaphysical Light, *enlightens every Man coming into the World*.³⁸

Here, then, is something the truth of which Bayle is pretty convinced of. But there is further evidence that he is not a sceptic, evidence crucial to his argument for toleration. There are passages in which Bayle cites a largish list of matters that he is 'verily persuaded of': that there is an Almighty God; that he spoke by an external voice to Adam; that he spoke inwardly to the conscience of Adam; that an inward light enlightened his conscience; that this light informed him of his duty to and dependence on God; and so on. In addition, he writes of those who are in error on matters of fact. But more importantly he appeals to the principles of natural light, both speculative (logical and metaphysical) and practical (the natural

³⁶ Bayle 66 7.

³⁷ Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 389 92.

³⁸ Bayle 69. The allusion is to John 1: 9.

enlightenment of the conscience), ‘those primitive Ideas’, ‘which carry their own Conviction with ’em.’³⁹

So here is what looks rather like a case of moral foundationalism. There is a set of moral principles which are self-affirming or self-intimating in character—a universal, ‘primitive’ (i.e. innate) endowment, focusing on the idea of equity, and expressed by Bayle in the following principle: ‘[A]ll particular Doctrines whether advanc’d as contain’d in Scripture, or propos’d in any othr way, are false, if repugnant to the clear and distinct Notions of natural light, especially if they relate to Morality.’⁴⁰ It is not clear, however, that these ‘clear and distinct Notions of natural light’ meet the criterion that we earlier saw Bayle adopting. Call this principle N. Of course, N is not self-evidently true; it is the conclusion of an argument. Nonetheless, Bayle claims that it is the only alternative to ‘the most execrable Pyrrhonism.’

So there is knowledge here, even perhaps self-evident knowledge of first principles, and reasonable beliefs that we may adopt from using them. Nonetheless, though these principles are innate, and self-convincing, we are not infallibly in control of them. Calvin, of course, appeals to something similar to Bayle, though his terminology is somewhat different; he appeals to the universal *sensus divinitatis*, which has a moral component, central to which is the idea of equity.⁴¹ But the *sensus* fails to function properly because of the noetic effects of sin, yet it functions sufficiently well to render men and women without excuse.

I think it is fair to say that although Bayle recognizes the noetic effects of sin, its adverse effects upon natural light, he nonetheless has a more robust account than does Calvin of the possibility of natural light functioning in the postlapsarian world. He understands the Fall in terms of the obscuring of natural light:

’Tis very probable, that had not the confus’d Sensations of Pleasure, excited in the Soul of our first Parent upon proposing the forbidden Fruit, drown’d the eternal Ideas of natural Equity . . . It is, I say, very probable that he had never transgress the Law of God; which ought to be a continual Warning to us, never to turn away our Eyes from that natural Light, let who will make Propositions to us of doing this thing or that with regard to Morality.⁴²

And he later writes of the possibility, which he clearly fears, of people distrusting their reason ‘[i]f we had not a natural Light afforded us, as a sure and infallible Rule for judging upon every thing that can fall under

³⁹ Bayle 73 4.

⁴⁰ Bayle 75.

⁴¹ Helm, *John Calvin’s Ideas*, 377.

⁴² Bayle 70.

Debate, not excepting even this Question, *Whether such or such a thing is contain'd in Scripture.*⁴³ If Bayle is not a sceptic then by the same or a similar token he is not a fideist either. But he is most certainly a fallibilist, emphasizing (as we have seen) the restrictedness both of our faculties and of our opportunities.⁴⁴

A second, subordinate epistemological argument that Bayle considers and offers a rebuttal to is what we may call the *objection from grace*. This is put by him as follows: 'They'l object that the Grace of the Holy Spirit, which interposes in our Conversion, gives us the Gift of discerning Truth from Falsehood.'⁴⁵ Here he takes account of the idea mentioned earlier, that conviction comes from the gracious persuasion of the mind, but that the Spirit brings knowledge that may be held with utter certainty. The Holy Spirit affords infallible discernment.

In his response Bayle makes use of the Calvinist distinction between *assensus* and *fiducia*. This distinction is a way of coping with the tension that arises from the appeal to the internal and the external *indicia* of Scripture as grounds for accepting its inspiration and authority. Education is sufficient for establishing *assensus*, or for coming to the conclusion that there's more reason to historical hypothesis A than to hypothesis B. After all, the devils are firmly persuaded of the truth of the doctrines of Christianity. But the faith which is worth having is not a mere historical faith, the result of education, but the faith which works by love.⁴⁶

The emphasis here is quite different from Calvin's, for whom the testimony of the Holy Spirit works epistemologically, not merely morally. Nevertheless, he is not totally dismissive of Calvin's original argument. He is Calvinist enough not to deny altogether the operations of divine grace in the proper forming of beliefs:

There's no need of advertising my Reader, that I don't here exclude the Operations of Grace from the Act which makes us adhere to reveal'd Truths. I'm free to own, that 'tis Grace which makes us perceive that such or such a Sense of Scripture is true, and which disposes our Mind in such a manner, that precisely the Sense which is true will appear true to us. But I maintain, that the Grace which produces this Perception, does not however afford us any certain and convincing Argument of the Sense which we believe true. We believe it firmly; and without being able to define it against a learned and subtil Adversary, we remain convinc'd notwithstanding that it is the reveal'd Truth . . . still I say, that as Faith affords us no other Criterion of Orthodoxy than the inward Sentiment and Conviction of Conscience, a Criterion common to all, even the most heretical

⁴³ Bayle 75.

⁴⁴ Bayle 77, 101.

⁴⁵ Bayle 523.

⁴⁶ Bayle 525.

Souls; it follows; that all our Belief, whether Orthodox or Heterodox, is finally resolv'd into this, that we feel it, and it seems to us that this or that is true.⁴⁷

At the heart of Bayle's methodism, therefore, is the absence of a universally compelling argument for self-certifying truth in matters of religion; instead, there are self-certifying principles of 'natural light.' So he advocates a common-sense approach, grounding opinions on the principles of natural light, and (where this is relevant) on evidence, and therefore on the balance of probabilities. He is certainly not advocating a total suspense of judgement. The approach he is advocating, he thinks, is in fact common to all parties, and all should recognize this. We noted earlier that Calvin's dual approach to establishing the authority of Scripture, internal testimony and probabilistic reasoning, is unstable. Here, in Bayle's position, we see the effects of that instability at work. Even if there is no out-and-out rejection of the self-authenticating role of the Holy Spirit, he regards it as equivalent to 'such and such seems to be true,' which all religionists from whatever quarter may claim, and so he favours probabilistic reasoning and in the last resort a religious preference based upon conscience or moral intuition.

TUCKNEY AND WHICHCOTE

Finally, in this chapter, we move to Puritan England, to an argument which focuses on the fate of another feature of the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. According to Calvin, the activity of the Spirit is supremely rational, since God himself is supremely wise and is himself the source of the conviction that the Bible is the word of God. Whether in religion reason operates only through Scripture, or independently of Scripture, is what is debated between Anthony Tuckney and his former student Benjamin Whichcote.

Antony Tuckney was educated at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, became a tutor there, and after that a minister at Boston in Lincolnshire. In 1643 he was called to be a member of the Westminster Assembly, representing Lincoln, and became a minister in London. He became Provost of Emmanuel College in 1644 and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge from 1648, and in 1653 became Master of St John's College, and Regius Professor of Divinity. Benjamin Whichcote, a pupil and friend of Tuckney's, became a fellow of Emmanuel College in 1633, Provost of King's

⁴⁷ Bayle 265.

in 1644, and Vice-Chancellor in 1651, and was to become a leading figure in Cambridge Platonism.

The controversy between them, conducted in a series of eight letters,⁴⁸ can be regarded, from one point of view, as between members of the Puritan educational establishment at Cambridge. The correspondence was started and ended by Tuckney, the former tutor being alarmed at the unorthodox theological implications of the public opinions of his former student. Yet like Pierre Bayle's discussions of the public status of Scripture and of theology, the Tuckney–Whichcote letters are also written in the context of debates about the nature and extent of religious tolerance, and they make a contribution to it.⁴⁹ The issues discussed are not resolved. With the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 the Puritan hegemony of Cambridge was ended, and both Tuckney and Whichcote were relieved of their positions.

In an effort to propose a greater degree of tolerance, Whichcote, in his commencement address entitled *De Certitudine*, to which Tuckney took exception, made certain 'proposals for peace.' In particular, he stresses the distinction between Scripture and its interpretation. All good men accept the authority of the original Scripture; where they differ is in the use of non-scriptural language to interpret it and to formulate various biblical doctrines in sermons, treatises, confessions of faith, and the like. Quoting from his sermon notes, Whichcote wrote:

'The proposal for peace—That all be looked-upon as fallible, which is *ultra et citra scripturam* [*more and less than what is written*].—And, Sir, is there on earth power to adde, alter or change? Is not the foundation of Protestancy, *Sacra scriptura est adequata regula fidei* [*Holy Scripture is the sufficient rule for the faith*]? are not scripture formes of wordes sufficient, yea aptest, to convey and carry all saving truth to the mindes and understandings of men? Farther I argued that for peace among good Christians.—'Good men, differing in *their own* expressions, yet agree in *Scripture* formes of words: acknowledging, the meaning of the holy Ghost in them is true; and they endeavour to understand and finde it out, as well as they can: therefore they shou'd continue friends; and think, they agree; rather than think, they do not agree; (because they *do* agree, in what is God's and infallible; though they differ, in what is their own and fallible:) and

⁴⁸ The text of the letters is taken from that in Tod. E. Jones (ed.), *The Cambridge Platonists: A Brief Introduction, With Eight Letters of Dr Antony Tuckney and Dr Benjamin Whichcote*, translations by Sara E. Phang (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2005). Occasional amendments have been made to the translations.

⁴⁹ *Letters*, 71 2. See also 77: 'proposal for peace'; 85: agreement upon fundamentals; 143 4: toleration; 145: national consensus.

upon this consideration forbear one another; and not impose their own, either sense or phrase.⁵⁰

Such proposals became commonplace in the 1650s in England when the various mainstream Protestant parties were attempting to unite in terms of what they held in common so as to resist ‘enthusiasm’ from the left wing and Roman Catholicism from the right wing. All such proposals foundered, and they ceased to be live political options at the Restoration and the passing of the Act of Uniformity in 1662, which re-established Anglicanism.

Whichcote’s own contribution to this debate is expressed as an epistemological thesis: While the uninterpreted Bible is infallible, the various human interpretations of it are all fallible. So in a society of good men these fallible interpretations should coexist side by side, and each should be tolerated. However, he does not state that all such interpretations are *equally* fallible, and perhaps what he says in addition implies that he does not think that they are all equally fallible. But at any rate the proposal, if accepted, would mean that no one can hope to establish that his own interpretation of the Bible is ‘scriptural’ in a sense that excludes other possible interpretations which may equally well be offered as conveying Scripture’s infallible teaching.

He drew a further distinction, between necessary theological truths and those that are contingent. The line between the two also marks the distinction between natural and revealed theology. Natural theology, the province of reason, has to do with necessary truths about God, and about which publicly-reasoned apodictic conclusions can be drawn. Revealed theology concerns what God, as a matter of fact, has contingently willed and so might otherwise not have willed. About these (as we have seen) we are in the safest position if we simply confess and recite what God has revealed and recognize that our efforts to formulate doctrines in our own words are fallible and so not to be insisted upon. He makes the distinction very clear in his second letter to Tuckney:

For those things, which, *quantum ad me* [so far as my capacity will allow], are matters of faith; as they are revealed by God: *apud Deum sunt materia libertatis et beneplaciti, et ergo, antecedenter ad determinationem Dei, possent aliter esse* [they are subjects at the liberty and good-pleasure of God; and therefore, before being determined of God, they may be otherwise]; and God might otherwise have determined them. But *materia theologiae naturalis intrinsicam habet necessitatem, aut infallibilem connexionem terminorum* [the subject matter of natural theology

⁵⁰ Letters, 77 8; see also 105.

possesses an intrinsic necessity, and an infallible relationship to its ends]: In *material theologiae naturalis* I do *scire* [know]; because I can demonstrate, *ex principiis certis necessariis et infallibilibus* [from certain, necessary, and infallible principles]: in *materia fidei* [the matter of faith] I do *credere* [believe] because I take things to be so, as revealed by God; which, if God would, might have bin otherwise; because absolutely and of themselves they were in an indifferency.⁵¹

So, corresponding to the distinction between natural and revealed theology there is another epistemological thesis: natural theology is the product of reason, and so its conclusions reasonable and certain. By contrast, revealed theology, which is the product of fallible human reason as it works on the text of Scripture, has no intrinsic necessity to it, and though we must accept it as coming from God, and as true, we must recognize that our interpretation is correspondingly tentative.

Whichcote's proposal for peace among 'centre-ground' Christians, the distinction between the epistemological status of natural and revealed theology, depends upon another epistemological factor. He has a view of reason as an innate power to derive and detect truths about God, reason as 'the candle of the Lord', a God-given faculty which can bring its user to necessary and certain conclusions about the being and perfections of God. Its working does not depend upon the special and individual operation of the Holy Spirit on the human mind, nor upon reliance on Scripture. While Whichcote does not deny the place of reason 'as a receiver, as a discerner, as a principle to be instructed and taught; not as an author or inventor or controuler of what God speaks',⁵² he contrasts his position with the Calvinists' appeal to the testimony of the Spirit in accepting the authority of Scripture as coming from God. This is, he says, a 'singular argument, nothing to him that feels itt not',⁵³ and claims instead that 'Divine truth allwaies [carries] its own light and evidence; so as that the mind receiving itt is illuminated, edified, satisfied.'⁵⁴ The criterion for Whichcote is right reason, the conclusions of which all good men could agree on, and not the 'singular' appeal of the Calvinists.⁵⁵

To see why Whichcote's proposals were so alarming to Tuckney we must first take a step or two backwards. He does not criticize Whichcote's appeal to reason, nor does he object to his appeal to 'good men' as vaguely expressed and somewhat optimistic, nor to his language as being somewhat disingenuous—as well he might have. Rather, he objects to the fact that the way in which Whichcote expressed himself, and his intentions,

⁵¹ *Letters*, 98.

⁵² *Letters*, 101.

⁵³ *Letters*, 140.

⁵⁴ *Letters*, 101.

⁵⁵ *Letters*, 103.

signalled a departure from Puritan orthodoxy. Cambridge Puritanism was transmuted into Cambridge Platonism.

The *Westminster Confession of Faith*, which in the decade before his exchange with Whichcote Tuckney seems to have worked tirelessly in helping to compile,⁵⁶ has in its opening chapter the following statements about Scripture:

IV The authority of the holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the Author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the word of God.

V We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the church, to an high and reverend esteem of the holy scripture, and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the stile, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole, (which is to give all glory to God,) the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments where it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God; yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by, and with the word in our hearts.⁵⁷

It is worth noting certain features of these statements. First, although they reverse the order of Calvin's treatment of the epistemology of the authority of Scripture in the 1559 *Institutes*, the overall outlook is very similar. The first paragraph summarizes the conclusion of what is in fact Calvin's overall position, while the second makes two characteristically Calvinian claims. Despite what the first paragraph states, that the authority of Scripture does not depend upon human testimony, the second paragraph opens by asserting that nevertheless the testimony of the Church has some value which may move and induce us to esteem Holy Scripture, going on to identify certain 'arguments' which provide evidence that the Bible is indeed the word of God. This section clearly corresponds to what Calvin referred to in book I.8 of the *Institutes* as the 'external proofs.'

The last section quoted, contrasting 'an high and reverend esteem' with a 'full persuasion and assurance' from the 'inward work of the Holy Spirit', corresponds to Calvin's 'internal proofs', the internal work of the Holy Spirit, its testifying in the heart that the evidence provided by Scripture is

⁵⁶ According to B. B. Warfield, Tuckney was among the committee members of the Assembly who in 1644 were charged with preparing material for a confession of faith, and was a member of the committee who in the following year reviewed the finished *Confession* (*The Westminster Assembly and Its Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), 156–8).

⁵⁷ *The Confession of Faith* (Edinburgh: Kincaid, 1773).

indeed evidence of its being God's word. But note that what for Calvin were defensive, apologetic arguments designed to support the 'opinion' that the Bible is God's word against sceptics have now become positive arguments in their own right, alongside the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit.

I do not claim that these striking points of correspondence are evidence that the Westminster divines, including Tuckney, had the *Institutes* open in front of them as they debated and drafted the *Confession's* first chapter. Nevertheless, B. B. Warfield has shown that though the *Confession's* proximate source is the Irish Articles of 1615 the *Institutes* may well have been among the principal original sources of the chapter.⁵⁸ However this may be, what is arrived at, partly with the assistance of Tuckney, has a striking material correspondence to Calvin's outlook, and it is reasonable to suppose that Tuckney shared that outlook.

Tuckney's alarm at Whichcote's views is consistent with this supposition. He expresses concern over Whichcote's emphasis upon reason, 'divinest reason',⁵⁹ and his claim that reason has the power to demonstrate certain theological conclusions. He feared the consequences of ascribing a self-authenticating character to human reason, and not to the Scriptures. These (to Tuckney) extravagant claims, extravagant in the sense that they promote matters of theological prolegomena to centre stage, and give them an exclusive status, were combined with the view that, by comparison with the operations of reason, Scripture is unclear because many incompatible and equally plausible interpretations of it may be offered by good men. Tuckney could see that if this understanding of the scope and power of reason were to prevail, then Christian theology would be restricted to a core of theological and moral propositions, with Puritan orthodoxy being demoted to one opinion among many. As a consequence the status of Scripture exposition and preaching would be downgraded if not altogether dismissed.

So in his correspondence with Whichcote, when he discusses the acceptance of the authority of Scripture, Tuckney places relatively little emphasis on reason, and more on faith. He has a clear place for reason, however. After all, the *Westminster Confession's* chapter on Scripture also has this:

VI The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from scripture.

⁵⁸ Warfield, *Westminster Assembly*, 159–60.

⁵⁹ *Letters*, 71.

So the authority of Scripture extends to what by ‘good and necessary consequence’ may be deduced from its text. What can be deduced from Scripture is itself part of the cognitive content of Scripture, provided that these deductions are ‘good’; that is, that the ‘deductions’ are not mere proof-texting, but have regard to the intention of the writer, and rest on the results of an inductive process in which all relevant scriptural data are collated and taken into account.⁶⁰ The meaning of Scripture is Scripture, so Scripture is not to be restricted to its *ipsissima verba*. Reason, in the sense of inductive and deductive logic, has a prime place in the elaboration of the meaning of Scripture.

So when Tuckney compares faith with reason, and downplays the latter, he has something else in mind than the formalities of logic; namely, the more substantive sense of reason that Whichcote was appealing to, reason as ‘the candle of the Lord.’⁶¹ And when he talks of faith he in effect conflates both the object of faith—the revealed mysteries of Scripture—and the act of faith in relying upon them.

He complains that the subject of Whichcote’s sermon *De Certitudine* should not have led him to talk of the infallible light of human reason, but

that our faith shou’d be ultimately resolved in *rationem rei, ex parte objecti* [by natural reason, with respect to its object]; and that *ex parte subjecti, ratio humana* [with respect to the subject, human reason] should be *summus iudex* [the supreme judge]; which was expressly asserted by you, in your answer to my argument; as I then said, it was *new*, so now I thinke it very *strange* divinity.⁶²

For Tuckney, reason involves logical reasoning, but our capacity to reason is bounded by the mysteries of revelation, which we cannot fully penetrate or fathom. We have to appreciate things as they are, and mysteries should be accepted for what they are, and attempts to reason about them should be restricted accordingly, restricted to depicting them and guarding them against misapprehension rather than explaining them.⁶³ Nonetheless, because the mysteries are revealed mysteries, one may have the utmost confidence in them.

It would be a mistake to think that this emphasis on faith makes a fideist of Tuckney. His reference to faith does not signal a leap of faith, a Jamesian will to believe, but registers the fact that for him the authority of Scripture

⁶⁰ See the interesting historical treatment of the phrase ‘good and necessary consequence’ in Jack B. Rogers, *Scripture in the Westminster Confession* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1967), 333–4.

⁶¹ *Letters*, 84. Later Tuckney notes that both understanding and reason are necessary for the exercise of faith, but that a believer must in many things believe more than he can understand (p. 115).

⁶² *Letters*, 84.

⁶³ *Letters*, 115.

rests on external proofs accessible not only to the reason, but primarily to the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, testifying (in an enlightening, illuminating way) to the internal *indicia* of Holy Scripture, including its mysteries, the Spirit working ‘by and with the word’ as the *Confession* has it.

So the

discourse *de certitudine*, &c. was indeed an argument fitt for such a meeting: [i.e. for a Commencement Address] but that certainly I beleeve, most of your auditours wou’d have judged, might have bin more satisfactorily and theologically made-out, from the certainty of divine testimonie, and faith in it; than of reason: and wou’d gladly then, and at other times, have *Faith* to have bin advanced; rather than *Reason* cried-up: which is yet so frequently [done], that it is now *cramte* [*cabbage cooked*], not *bis* [*twice*] but *centies cocta* [*a hundred times*]; and so proves nauseous: and your then so large discourse about it, but the fourth edition of what manie of them had before, in your position, determination, sermons, at Trinity and otherwhere.⁶⁴

Tuckney complains about the prominence given to reason as a source of religious knowledge, as a sufficient source of it rather than a necessary check on candidates for it—not only a sufficient source, but a sufficient infallible source, in contrast (as Whichcote held) to the fallibilities of Christian theologizing.

Whichcote’s view that all interpretations of Scripture are to be regarded as fallible leads to Tuckney’s second concern, that the consequence of Whichcote’s position is a downplaying of Christian doctrine, and correlatively, a promoting and privileging of natural theology and ‘natural light’ over revealed truth and faith in it. So Tuckney’s positive view of Christian doctrine, befitting a Puritan, shows us that despite his strictures on his pupil’s talking up of reason he himself also has a positive view of reason:

True; the understanding cannot rightlie judge otherwise, than the thing is: *veritas rei* [*the truth of a thing*] being *regula veritatis intellectus* [*the rule of our understanding regarding truth*]. But our present dispute is, about the power of Reason to judge of matters of Faith: And as the Apostle speakes of a ‘spirit of wisdom and revelation’; so wee conceeve, that to our right understanding such mysteries, *ex parte subjecti* [*on the part of the subject*], hee must bee a spirit of wisdom; and so *ratio* [*reason*] must bee *divinitatis illuminata* [*divinely illuminated*]: and, *ex parte objecti* [*from an objective standpoint*], a spirit of revelation; and so *objectum* [*the object*] must bee *revelatum* [*revealed*]. And this revelation must bee of the formalitie of the object, which is understood and beleaved; and so, by this

⁶⁴ *Letters*, 84.

illumination of the understanding and revelation of the object, the discerning faculties is [*sic*] fully regulated in its apprehensions of these mysteries: and therefore I cannot tell, whether you may say; 'it is wholly regulated, *a ratione objecti* [*based on objective reason*], &c.'⁶⁵

So the theological effect of this epistemological shift from one sense of reason to another is from Tuckney's standpoint disastrous. Natural theology and its rationally discovered certainties take centre stage, edging revealed theology into the wings, on the grounds that revealed theology can only ever be a matter of opinion, and hence fallible and uncertain.

In his treatment of Scripture Calvin stressed not only its objective truth, whether or not this is discernible by all, but also that it is an expression of the supreme mind. For this reason it is inappropriate to look for proofs of the divine authority of Scripture, and in subjecting ourselves to its authority we gain 'a conviction which accords with the highest reason.'⁶⁶ We have seen in our examination of Bayle's position that the objective truth of Scripture begins to cease to be an all-important item of public awareness. It has to sit alongside other religions which in turn claim to be objectively true. In looking at the Tuckney–Whichcote letters it is clear that Tuckney is fighting a rearguard action in defending the utter reasonableness of subjecting oneself to scriptural authority against the more expansive view of reason, and the consequent fallibility of dogmatic theology, of his erstwhile student Whichcote. Whichcote, like Bayle, is threatening the status of Reformed theology as 'public doctrine.'

CALVIN, BAYLE, AND THE TUCKNEY–WHICHCOTE CORRESPONDENCE

I have been arguing that as regards the Christian revelation Calvin is a particularist and Bayle a methodist. Each is a fallibilist, but Calvin's fallibilism appears to be more restricted than Bayle's, at least as judged by the language that he uses to characterize the fruits of the Spirit's self-authenticating activity. Those who benefit from such activity have a 'perfect conviction' that God is the author of Scripture, the 'highest proof', full conviction, highest assurance.⁶⁷ Calvin seems never to use the term 'infallible' here, but he comes close to it, and uses semantic equivalents. We might call Bayle a universal fallibilist, whereas Calvin holds that with respect to certain core theological matters there is the possibility of infallible knowledge. God the Holy Spirit may bring our

⁶⁵ *Letters*, 115 16.

⁶⁶ *Inst.* I.7.5.

⁶⁷ *Inst.* I.7.4 5.

minds to know unerringly, and not just to believe or have an opinion. The meaning of a certain set of propositions may be understood and the propositions thus understood may be known to be true with certainty or assurance. The peripheral propositions, though only believed fallibly, or even believed only implicitly, nonetheless have a special status in virtue of having a fairly strong organic relation to the core.

How might Calvin have responded to Bayle's universal fallibilism? The question is anachronistic, of course, but not strongly so, because Calvin was aware of fallibilistic approaches to Scripture, treating belief in its trustworthiness as an 'opinion.' I will suggest some possible ways in which, consistently with many things that Calvin says and especially with his epistemic particularism, he might have reacted. That is, if we suppose that Calvin more or less held his ground, that he did not change his mind and become an out-and-out Baylian, how might it go? If there is unwelcome anachronism here, the reader might care to substitute the person of an ideal Calvinian rather than think in terms of Calvin himself.

Perhaps Calvin (and the Calvinian) could agree with Bayle more than Bayle allows, when these issues are considered *at the level of common grace*. Bearing in mind Calvin's distinction between 'things above' and 'things below' (which we will discuss more fully in Chapter 10), he could argue that Bayle's criterion may operate 'below', in society, as the epistemic basis for the social policy of entitlement to express one's own sincerely held religious opinions, whereas at another level, the level of grace, nothing need change. For Bayle recognizes that false religious views could nonetheless produce public virtue just as pagan philosophy could. Perhaps the tragedy of the Servetus affair reveals that Calvin's theory was better than his practice, or that he looked back to the virtues of the ancient pagan world with more indulgence than he extended towards his heterodox contemporaries:

I deny not, that whatever excellent endowments appear in unbelievers are divine gifts. Nor do I set myself so much in opposition to common sense, as to contend that there was no difference between the justice, moderation, and equity of Titus and Trajan, and the rage, intemperance, and cruelty of Caligula, Nero and Domitian; between the continence of Vespasian, and the obscene lusts of Tiberius; and (not to dwell on single virtues and vices) between the observance of law and justice, and the contempt of them. So great is the difference between justice and injustice, that it may be seen even where the former is only a lifeless image.⁶⁸

That is, Calvin could maintain his epistemic particularism by attributing to those who differ from him self-deception, erroneous understandings, carelessness, or whatever, and yet recognize the goodness of God in restraining evil and promoting public virtue. He could even allow that at the phenomenological level there is no ‘felt difference’ between the orthodox and the rest. He could even hitch this to a social policy of limited toleration, holding (as in fact he did) that it was the duty of the magistrate to uphold Calvinistic orthodoxy, but allowing (as he did not) that others were free within certain limits to advocate their own opinions—rather like the situation in England following the Revolution of 1688 where the Church of England was established and certain types of dissent from that Church were tolerated.

Bayle advocates something close to this in the closing words of his work on toleration:

My Principles assert the Authority of the Magistrate in Matters of Religion up to this Point; but that which I condemn, and he suppresses, is, That not content to establish the Reform’d Religion in their Dominions, and give it the Preheminence as they might justly do, they abolish’d every other kind of Worship, and condemn’d those to Punishments who cou’d not in Conscience depart from the Religion of their Fathers, or conform to that Plan of Reformation which had bin approv’d by their Princes.⁶⁹

The details on the social side do not matter for present purposes. What does matter is whether Calvin could continue to uphold his particularism in a situation of toleration. And the answer seems obviously ‘Yes.’ Just as he could maintain his particularism in a situation where Calvinistic orthodoxy was persecuted, as in the France of Louis XIV, so he could uphold it in a situation of toleration, whether universal or limited in character. But the price to be paid would be that Reformed theology would no longer have sole claim on the allegiance of the people. And, as the Servetus affair revealed, Calvin and the magistracy of Geneva were not prepared to pay that price, but to prevent it at almost any price.

That’s one way of interpreting both Calvin and Bayle. But there’s another way, one that pits their views against each other. For Bayle may be taken as denying that there is such a thing as the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, or claiming that at best it provides a degree of evidence and convincingness no greater than the external proofs. In other words, his discussion of grace might be regarded as entirely *ad hominem*. Then

⁶⁹ Bayle 574.

there would be a straight doctrinal or theological disagreement between the two Frenchmen.

And what of Calvin and the Tuckney–Whichcote exchange? Here I think that it is clear that his sympathies would lie with Tuckney, and he could hardly be expected to agree to Whichcote's almost liturgical attitude to Scripture. Calvin was adamant that Scripture is to be expounded and preached, for much of its meaning is clear, and the meaning of many of the less clear parts may be resolved by reference to the parts that are clear. Nevertheless, Calvin also recognizes that there are grades of clarity, and so grades of conviction as to what particular parts of Scripture may mean, and grades of faith in its promises according to whether these are more or less comprehended. But he may have been reluctant to narrow the reference of 'reason' in the way that Tuckney was inclined to do in the light of the Cambridge Platonist appeal to reason as 'the candle of the Lord.' For Calvin, Scripture is the word of the eternal Word, the divine Logos, and therefore rational in a deep sense, the word of him who is the fountain of reason and truth.

Bayle's general epistemology, including his epistemology of divine revelation, is not that of a sceptic, as some have held, but he espouses universal fallibilism, universal in the sense that it covers all matters of contingent fact and of metaphysics, and excepts only the formalities of basic logical and mathematical claims and those that are discernible by 'natural light.' He is thus a classic Chisholmian 'methodist.' This fallibilism, for which he has several arguments, becomes a chief ground for his advocacy of religious toleration between all religious positions which do not advocate or support the overthrow of the political order needed for the flourishing of toleration itself. The fact that the arguments must themselves have a fallible character does not of course in any way undermine the position or cause it to refute itself. The fallibility of the arguments simply adds further evidence for his overall fallibilism. Note that the argument is from fallibilism to toleration. Nowhere, as far as I can tell, does he defend, or even consider, the reverse argument, so characteristic of modernity. He never argues that if toleration, then fallibilism. He is too good a philosopher to fall for this.

By contrast, Whichcote's position is messier, less elegant, than Bayle's, and has strong tendencies to internal instability. For he is a partial fallibilist, a fallibilist with respect to the sphere of Christian theological dogma, and no doubt with respect to other matters of no interest to us here. Because of this partial fallibilism he too is inclined to grant liberty to prophesying, but only (it seems) if all the participants to theological dispute agree to the following ground rule: 'No one shall be a participant

in theological disputation unless he too recognizes his own fallibility.' Such 'prophesying' must be fallible because it concerns contingent matters of fact, even though these are understood to be or to involve sublime mysteries. As regards some metaphysical truths, Whichcote is an infallibilist. Reason, 'the candle of the Lord' (the mantra which so irritated Tuckney), can unerringly guide us into true conclusions about 'natural theology.' So—although the discussion between the correspondents never reached this point—it would be perfectly consistent for Whichcote to advocate intolerance towards errors in natural theology. Perhaps this is part of the import of his reference, at several points, to 'good men.' Good men are those who recognize where the candle of the Lord shines, and where it does not. All good men, and their intellectual productions, are to be tolerated. But men who are less good, or not good at all, may not have toleration extended towards them.

This position is inherently unstable because, at the second-order level, the level at which the summary of the previous paragraph is conducted, the position cannot be argued for, only advocated, as he was evidently advocating it in the commencement address that so upset Tuckney and his friends. Suppose someone claimed that the 'candle of the Lord' has more power than Whichcote claims, or less, it is hard to see what he could argue by way of reply. His position is unstable for another reason; namely, that his particularistic fallibilism is not sufficiently strong to uphold the basic elements of Christian orthodoxy, including, say, the doctrine of the Trinity and of the Incarnation, which are after all doctrines drawn by human hands from the well of divine revelation. He has therefore to adopt a position which compromises his basic view of how the Bible is to be handled, or to risk being branded a 'Socinian' or worse, which is not a charge that a head of a Cambridge College during the Commonwealth could have lived with for long.

We began by claiming that Calvin's position is inherently unstable. I have tried to illustrate and offer support for it, using the cases of Bayle and Whichcote to do this. But taking this route has led us to another conclusion: that while Calvin's position is unstable, those who press this in argument do not agree among themselves. The instability infects both Calvin and his opponents.

The case of Pierre Bayle, and the controversy between Tuckney and Whichcote provide documentary evidence of some of the intellectual arguments in Protestantism which led, during the closing years of the seventeenth century, to the marginalizing of the classical Calvinist position on Holy Scripture as this had become embodied not only in documents such as the *Westminster Confession* and the dogmatics of Reformed

Orthodoxy but also in the social fabric of Holland, Geneva, and Puritan England. Nevertheless, the arguments, the epistemological positions, of Bayle and Whichcote, are quite different. Bayle tends to a strong version of fallibilism; Whichcote, via a partial fallibilism, to rationalism. When such as Bayle and Whichcote are heralded as the forerunners of the Enlightenment, this reminds us that that movement was no more monochrome than the religious and theological positions that it sought to supplant.

The Visibility of God

THE PROBLEM

CALVIN takes up several theological positions which *prima facie* have the consequence that his is a hidden God and that Calvin is a theological agnostic. First, as we have already noted, in a thorough and principled way he distinguishes between God as he is in himself and God as he is towards us. And it may seem from this that God in himself is hidden and unknowable, and as a consequence that the relation between these two ways of regarding God is somewhat problematic. Second, Calvin exercises considerable restraint even with respect to God *quoad nos*, for he stresses that many of God's activities, even his salvific activities, are shrouded in mystery and incomprehensibility. Third, for him divine freedom plays a central part both in creation and redemption—freedom to create or not, freedom to redeem or not. Even if he rejects the idea of an arbitrary God, which he most certainly does, it may still appear that we cannot so easily read off what God is from what God does.

Behind Calvin stands the figure of Augustine, who has been the subject of a forceful critique alleging that in his Trinitarian theology God is an unknowable substratum, and even that the idea of the unknowability that allegedly results from this view has contributed to modern agnosticism! We might therefore think that if this charge against Augustine can be made good it should also apply to John Calvin in equal measure. Later than Calvin is the figure of Immanuel Kant, and his influential distinction between things as they are in themselves (*noumena*) and things as they manifest themselves to us (*phenomena*). As we will see, there's been a tendency to map Calvin's distinction between God *in se* and *quoad nos* on to Kant's distinction, thus making God unknowable in a more emphatic fashion. Finally, we have the specifically Barthian claim that Calvin's God, though not strictly speaking unknowable, is insufficiently Christian—a God 'in general', as Karl Barth puts it. He thinks that this insufficiently specific God encourages speculation, even if Calvin himself is not a speculative theologian.

Some of these grounds for alleging that Calvin's God is invisible, or unknowable, can be fairly straightforwardly rebutted. As I showed in *John Calvin's Ideas*, although Calvin, in line with Aquinas and many another, distinguishes between God as he is in himself and God as he is to us, he argues that what God does is consistent with who God is, for God reveals something of himself even if he does not and cannot reveal the whole of himself.

In this chapter I wish to concentrate on the remaining claims. This (in the case of the charge levelled against Augustine, and so against Calvin) takes us into the area of Trinitarian theology, (in the case of Kant) into the sense in which God is incomprehensible, and (in the case of Barth's critique) into Christology.

THE AUGUSTINIAN BACKGROUND

Colin Gunton held that Augustine's account of the Trinity committed him to the 'essential unknowability of God',¹ or at least helped to foster that point of view. An essentially unknowable God cannot make himself known, he is necessarily invisible. For Gunton, such an unknowability doctrine has to do with the way in which he believes that the doctrine of the Trinity has been approached in the western theological tradition which Augustine inspired. The idea here is that in the West the doctrine of the Trinity is logically dependent upon the doctrine of God, particularly the unity and simplicity of God, whereas in the East the Trinity is what the doctrine of God *is*.

The argument seems to be that divine simplicity, or divine simplicity as Augustine understood it, entails unknowability. Perhaps the connecting thought is that simplicity is supposed to consist in featurelessness, so that in the case of a simple nature or essence there is nothing to know, and so nothing that could conceivably be made known. However, the way in which a metaphysical thesis, about divine simplicity, is linked to an epistemological thesis, of the unknowability of the divine essence, makes one somewhat uneasy.

An attempt is made by Gunton to bridge the gap between the metaphysical and the epistemological by first noting Augustine's reserve (or agnosticism) regarding the term 'person' in articulating the Trinity.² (This is, of course, a reserve that Calvin shares.³) And there is further concern over Augustine's definition of a person as a relation that is neither part of

¹ *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1991), 31.

² *On the Trinity*, trans. A. W. Haddan (Edinburgh: Clark, 1873), bks. V VII.

³ *Inst.* I.13.5.

the essence or substance of God nor an accident. ‘Augustine [is] unable to break out of the stranglehold of the dualistic ontology which underlies the logic.’⁴ Gunton does not explain what this dualism is, but it is presumably the dualism between substance and what may inhere in substance but is in some way distinct from it. In the case of material objects some of these features are accidental. The whiteness of the table is not essential to the table. In the case of God, according to Augustine, the three persons are in relation to each other, but not accidentally so. They have these relations essentially: they provide part of the account of who God is. For Augustine the three persons are essentially God, but relationally persons, as each is in relation to the other two persons.

According to Gunton, Augustine’s mistake is that he uses relation as a logical rather than as an ontological predicate.⁵ The idea here is that if the three persons are God, and God is one, then there is no ontological stuff left over that will constitute the three as three somethings or other, since the entire being of God consists in his one simple essence. ‘He [Augustine] is precluded from being able to make claims about the being of the *particular* persons, who, because they lack distinguishable identity tend to disappear into the all-embracing oneness of God.’⁶ Gunton is concerned that in the analogies that Augustine famously employs in *On the Trinity* he presents a picture in which the three persons are supported by an unknowable divine foundation, rather than, as Gunton would prefer, God being constituted by their threeness.

Gunton’s suggestion, arising from these discussions, is that for Augustine the being of God underlies the threeness of the persons like a substratum. ‘In that case, the danger is that the being of God will either be unknown in all respects—because it modalistically underlies the being of the persons—or will be made known other than through the persons, that is to say, the economy of salvation.’⁷ I suppose that he has the spectre of natural theology in mind at this point, though how an essentially unknowable God can be made known by natural theological arguments is not clear.

Students of modern western philosophy are familiar with the idea of a substratum from the philosophy of John Locke and, in a related though obviously distinct way, from acquaintance with Kant’s ‘noumenon’: the thing in itself. For Locke, a substratum is that which upholds the perceptibly manifest properties of an object, that in which those properties inhere, ‘something, I know not what’, as he laconically expresses it.

⁴ Gunton, *Promise*, 41.

⁵ *Promise*, 41 2.

⁶ *Promise*, 42.

⁷ *Promise*, 42.

It looks seriously anachronistic to impute such a view of substance to Augustine. In the ancient world, in Aristotle's *Categories* for example, a substance is something which cannot be an aspect or property of anything. Being a dog cannot be predicated of anything that is other than a dog, nor can being a dog be a feature of something else that is not a dog. It is thus essentially a logical or metaphysical distinction, lacking the epistemological character of Locke's substratum. Aristotle does not say that an individual substance such as a man is unknowable.

There are undoubtedly logical difficulties with Augustine's presentation of the Trinity. (For example, Augustine wishes to affirm that the Son is identical with God, but it must surely follow from this, by the symmetry of identity, that God is identical with the Son. And how can the Father generate the essence of the Son if the essence of the Son and the essence of the Father are one?⁸) Here we are concerned with a question of fact about Augustine; namely, is he committed to, or does he commit himself to, the idea of God as an unknowable substratum present in each of the three persons and thus conferring divinity upon them? Is Gunton correct? Here we will focus not so much on his argument as upon its conclusion, that according to Augustine the being of God underlies the threeness of the divine persons like an unknowable substratum. I will briefly try to show that whatever the overall consistency of Augustine's view of the Trinity, the evidence is overwhelmingly the other way in the one crucial respect that for him the one God is not an unknowable substrate.

There are two questions to be separated. First, does Augustine give logical priority to oneness in his formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity? Second, is that oneness an unknowable substratum? Here we will concentrate on the second question.

Before we come to this, however, we will touch on the question of Augustine's reserve about the term 'person.' There is, to begin with, the expression of a general reserve about human thought and speech about God, as in the opening of book V of *On the Trinity*:

Beginning, as I now do henceforwards, to speak of subjects which cannot altogether be spoken as they are thought, either by any man, or, at any rate, not by myself; although even our very thought, when we think of God the Trinity, falls (as we feel) very far short of Him of whom we think, nor comprehends Him as He is.⁹

⁸ Following Lewis Ayres's interpretation of Augustine (*Nicaea and its Legacy* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004), 379). On this type of difficulty see e.g. A. C. Lloyd, 'On Augustine's Concept of Person', in R. A. Markus (ed.), *Augustine: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1972).

⁹ *On the Trinity*, V.1.

So there is a double infirmity: an infirmity of human speech, which cannot express what we think, and of human thought, which does not do justice to the subject. But there is, in addition, a special, recurring concern about the propriety of ascribing ‘person’ to the three ‘somewhats’ of God’s triunity. Augustine gives two reasons for this concern. One is the tritheistic implication of such generic language.¹⁰ The other is the ‘flattening’ implication of using the same term for each of the three ‘somewhats’ that comprise the godhead, as if Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three instances of a kind with only accidental differences, as Tom, Dick, and Harry are three instances of humanity with accidental differences. Expressions of this reserve occur like a refrain through books 5–7 of *On the Trinity*, and in book 8. For example:

For the sake, then, of speaking of things that cannot be uttered, that we may be able in some way to utter what we are able in no way to utter fully, our Greek friends have spoken of one essence, three substances; but the Latins of one essence or substance, three persons; because, as we have already said, essence usually means nothing else than substance in our language, that is, in Latin. And provided that what is said is understood only in a mystery, such a way of speaking was sufficient, in order that there might be something to say when it was asked what the three are, which the true faith pronounces to be three, when it both declares that the Father is not the Son, and that the Holy Spirit, which is the gift of God, is neither the Father nor the Son. When, then, it is asked what the three are, or who the three are, we betake ourselves to the finding out of some special or general name under which we may embrace these three; and no such name occurs to the mind, because the supereminence of the Godhead surpasses the power of customary speech.¹¹

But such epistemological reserve in respect of the language of ‘person’ has no bearing on what Augustine says about the character of the divine essence, nor does it entail an agnosticism in his own views about the divine essence that he did not spot. Epistemic reserve about the applicability of the concept of a person to the divine threeness is one thing, agnosticism about ‘essence’ is quite another. In any case this may not be simply epistemic reserve. Augustine may just be acknowledging that he does not have a satisfactory term for the three, because he does not have a concept that fits the purpose of identifying what it is that the three (persons) are.

¹⁰ *On the Trinity*, VII.4, VII.6.

¹¹ *On the Trinity*, VII.4.

What the three have in common is not a nature, as the use of ‘person’ of each of them might suggest, but an essence, the one divine essence. A univocal use of ‘person’ as between ‘divine person’ and ‘human person’ would entail tritheism. So the word ‘person’ has to be appropriately qualified, to be used with reserve. ‘What therefore remains, except that we confess that these terms sprang from the necessity of speaking, when copious reasoning was required against the devices or errors of the heretics.’ A term such as person was needed in order to avoid Sabellianism. The point of using ‘person’ was in what the term denied, namely singleness, not in what it affirmed, diversity.¹² So reserve here does not indicate agnosticism about the divine nature, much less the absence of a ‘theological ontology’, but respect for the unparalleled uniqueness of the three-in-oneness of the godhead. It is inaccurate, therefore, to think that what distinguishes the three is a relation in a merely logical sense, the fruit of a simplistic application of Aristotelian logic, as Gunton proposes.¹³ This would make Trinitarianism simply nominal.

Gunton’s objection is that for Augustine it is not of the essence of God that he is Trinitarian, since Augustine says that the Trinitarian relations are not of God as he is in himself.¹⁴ But there is a simple confusion here, between what is true of the divine essence, and what is true of God necessarily. The persons are distinct, and in relation. But for Augustine these relations are necessary, not accidental (as Gunton recognizes). So God is essentially/necessarily Trinitarian. But (Augustine is saying) the relatedness that any understanding of the triunity requires is distinct from the divine essence which each person is. That does not mean, in turn, that their relatedness is purely referential, as if terms for the three are simply abstract place-holders, doing a merely formal job, markers with reference but no sense. It is precisely because they do not play such a purely referential role that Augustine agonizes over the appropriateness of the term ‘person.’

There is something, to be sure, that makes each of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit what they are. What is that something? It is something other than the divine essence which each of the persons is; namely, their inalienable relatedness to each other. But the attempt to provide a fuller answer than this is precisely what makes Augustine wrestle with the appropriateness or otherwise of ‘person.’ He concludes that the three are three somewhats, not three individuals, but ‘persons’ in the reserved sense which, Augustine believes, Scripture forces upon our minds.

¹² *On the Trinity*, VII.4.

¹³ *Promise*, 41.

¹⁴ *Promise*, 41.

Given Augustine's caution, born of a desire to preserve the unqualified deity of the three 'somewhats' as well as their distinctness, one might expect him to have a positive and not an agnostic response to the question of the character of the divine essence that the three have—not 'have in common,' or 'share,' but which they are, or are identical with. And so he does. We can see this operating in two ways: first, in what he says about the divine essence itself, and then in what he says about the deity of the three persons.

Discussing whether it is appropriate to think of the threeness of the Godhead as that of three essences or three greatnesses, which of course Augustine dismisses, he affirms that God is greatness, and not an instance of greatness, and:

Let the same be said also of the goodness, and of the eternity, and of the omnipotence of God, and, in short, of all the predicaments which can be predicated of God, as He is spoken of in respect to Himself. . . . the Trinity is called one God, great, good, eternal, omnipotent; and the same God Himself may be called His own deity, His own magnitude, His own goodness, His own eternity, His own omnipotence.¹⁵

Sometimes, as here, Augustine expresses the divine essence in terms of predicates ascribed to a subject, what God *has*, at other times in terms of divine simplicity, what God *is*:

But God is truly called in manifold ways, great, good, wise, blessed, true, and whatsoever other thing seems to be said of Him not unworthily: but His greatness is the same as His wisdom; for He is not great by bulk, but by power; and His goodness is the same as His wisdom and greatness, and His truth the same as all those things; and in Him it is not one thing to be blessed, and another to be great, or wise, or true, or good, or in a word to be Himself.¹⁶

So God does not have the property of being good, he *is* goodness, and truth, and greatness, and so on, with respect to all the other divine powers. Augustine takes great pains to stress this, not only in *On the Trinity*.¹⁷ In the *Confessions* he emphasizes the point that the divine being is not subject to the logic of Aristotle's *Categories*:

Thinking that absolutely everything that exists is comprehended under the ten categories, I tried to conceive of you also, my God, wonderfully simple and immutable, as if you too were a subject of which magnitude and beauty were attributes. I thought them to be in you as if in a subject, as in the case of a physical body, whereas you yourself are your own magnitude and your own beauty. By contrast a

¹⁵ *On the Trinity*, V.11 12, 156 7.

¹⁶ *On the Trinity*, VI.7.

¹⁷ *On the Trinity*, VII.1.

body is not great and beautiful by being body; if it were less great or less beautiful, it would nevertheless still be body.¹⁸

We will return to the significance of this. What this immediately shows, however, is that Augustine is working with what we might call a 'rich' concept of the divine essence, or of divine simplicity, of an indivisible being. The idea that divinity is capable of being understood as an unknowable substratum, the properties of which are exhaustively distributed among three persons, seems quite foreign to Augustine's approach. He is, at this juncture at least, the proponent of a constituent rather than a relational ontology.¹⁹

Being God, fully divine, each person is identical with the divine essence. So strong is this emphasis in Augustine that it leads him (in connection with considering 1 Cor. 1: 24: 'Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God') to raise the question of whether each person may be called God in abstraction from the other two, a proposal which of course he rejects, for it carries the implication that threeness is not integral to the godhead, that the Father and the Son are not of the same essence.²⁰ So far it seems that Augustine would reject the substratum view but without saying so in so many words.

However, it is in connection with this particular discussion that Augustine comes close to explicitly rejecting the substratum view of the way in which the three persons are divine, the view that Gunton ascribes to him and which is, in his view, indicative of the agnosticism to which Augustine is driven. In fact he does explicitly reject the view of substratum that H. A. Wolfson ascribes to him (according to Richard Cross²¹) and which Gunton appears to modify in a kind of Lockean direction. Augustine is discussing the way in which each of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are divine, and canvassing and rejecting various possibilities:

¹⁸ *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), IV.16.29.

¹⁹ For this distinction and its bearing on the idea of divine simplicity see Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'Divine Simplicity', in James E. Tomberlin (ed.), *Philosophical Perspectives, v. Philosophy of Religion* (Atascadero, Calif.: Ridgeview, 1991).

²⁰ *On the Trinity*, VII.1.

²¹ Cross, 'On Generic and Derivative Views of God's Trinitarian Substance', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 56 (2003), 464–80. Cross argues *inter alia* that Augustine's was not and could not be a derivative but a generic sense of divine substance. The generic view is that the persons share a universal (p. 467), the divine substance itself, a divine substrate (though not an unknowable substratum, despite Gunton's introduction of this term, following Wolfson). The generic view does not even make the divine substance somehow prior to the divine persons, and so (potentially at least) hidden. Certainly the divine substance is not prior except in the abstraction of human thought, and a fortiori cannot have causal priority over the persons, as their efficient cause. Rather, the Father is the cause/begetter of the Son with whom he shares the divine substance (p. 472).

So, although in the case of three golden statues we should rightly say three statues, one gold; yet we do not so say it, as to understand gold to be the genus and the statues to be species. Therefore neither do we so call the Trinity three persons or substances, one essence and one God, as though three somethings subsisted out of one matter; although whatever that is, it is unfolded in these three. For there is nothing else of that essence beside the Trinity. Yet we say three persons of the same essence, or three persons one essence; but we do not say three persons out of the same essence, as though therein essence were one thing, and person another, as we can say three statues out of the same gold; for there is one thing to be gold, another to be statues.²²

This is not the Lockean substratum doctrine imputed to him by Gunton, but it may be called the ‘matter’ or ‘stuff’ understanding of the divine nature advocated by Wolfson. On such a view the divine nature is that one indivisible nature out of which the three persons are formed, as this lump of gold is the matter out of which the three statues are formed. But it has this in common with the substratum doctrine, that it is that numerically one common source of the three persons; in the case of the substratum, as that which stands under or supports each person in respect of deity; in the case of the ‘matter’ or ‘stuff’ argument, as that out of which the three statues are formed. But Augustine rejects the logic common to each: that the three are formed out of a fourth thing, whether ‘something, I know not what’ or a substance like gold or air. ‘[W]e do not say three persons out of the same essence, as though therein essence were one thing, and person another, as we can say three statues out of the same gold; for there is one thing to be gold, another to be statues.’²³ At this point Gunton’s interpretation can surely be rebutted by the following argument: If, as Augustine claims, the three persons do not have a common source then a fortiori they cannot have an unknowable common source.

It is inherently implausible to suppose that Augustine is attracted to a substratum view of the divine essence for the simple reason that such a way of thinking is (for him) an instance of the application of the logic or grammar of material things. But it was precisely in reading ‘the books of the Platonists’ that Augustine believed that he had gained an insight into the operation of another grammar, the grammar of the existence of a simple, eternal, spiritual being. As he puts it in Letter 120, the divine essence is not what is behind the persons, the persons are not bounded or shaped and the essence unbounded and infinitely shapeless:

²² *On the Trinity*, VII.6.

²³ See Ayres, *Nicaea*, 379.

You know that in the Catholic faith it is the true and firm belief that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are one God, while remaining a Trinity . . . The Trinity is of one substance and [the] *essence is nothing else than the Trinity itself*.²⁴

In any case, the substratum doctrine is inherently implausible; for it raises the further question: If there is an unknowable substratum to each of the persons, what is there that is *divine* about such a thing? Why does the three persons' being upheld by such a substrate guarantee their full deity?

Having quoted Wolfson to the effect that Augustine identifies the substratum with something underlying the Father and the Son, Gunton comments, as noted above: 'In that case, the danger is that the being of God will either be unknown in all respects—because it modalistically underlies the being of the persons—or will be made known other than through the persons, that is to say, the economy of salvation.'²⁵ This seems rather hypothetical. It may be that Gunton is implicitly drawing attention to an area of difficulty in Augustine's view; namely, the difficulty of providing a positive account of person which is not tritheistic or modalistic in turn. But it would be wrong to approach a solution to this dilemma by proposing an account of things which is clearly at odds with what Augustine actually says.

Finally, there is the question of whether Augustine is explicitly committed to the substratum view. As we have noted, Gunton certainly sees a tendency in that direction. But is there textual support? *Substratum* is not a term that is employed by Augustine; rather, he uses substance, though he hesitates to use it as part of his account of the divine being because it is usually employed about things that are changeable, etc.²⁶ So in fact Augustine prefers *essentia*. God's essence is what God most truly is. For Augustine God is being itself, uncreated being and the source of the being of all else, and so 'essence' and 'essential' are the most appropriate terms to describe the unity of God's being.²⁷ One can think of essences in abstraction from persons, but the divine essence has no separate existence, but is parasitic on the persons, and a fortiori performs no causal role separable

²⁴ Quoted in Ayres, *Nicaea*, 375. See also Augustine, letter 170, in *Letters*, iv (165–203), trans. Sr. Wilfrid Parsons (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1955), 63. The Father is God and the source of deity in the Son and the Spirit, and hence not an unknowable substance, and the Son is not derived from an essence behind the Father.

²⁵ *Promise*, 42.

²⁶ *On the Trinity*, VI.5.194–5.

²⁷ Lewis Ayres, 'Being' in Allan Fitzgerald (ed.), *Augustine through the Ages* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999).

from the roles performed by the persons. Abstracting in this way is a consequence of our finitude. In *On the Trinity* Augustine argues that it is the Father not the divine essence that begets the Son, or speaks the Word. It is persons, not an essence, who act.²⁸

Part of Gunton's case against Augustine relies on his being committed to a point of logic which imposes an ontological stranglehold emphasizing the divine tripersonality.²⁹ Gunton's view is that Augustine's introduction of the idea that what distinguishes the three persons is a set of relations gives no metaphysical status to the persons. Gunton objects to the following passage:

But whereas, in the same Trinity, some things severally are specially predicated, these are in no way said in reference to themselves in themselves, but either in mutual reference or in respect to the creature; and, therefore, it is manifest that such things are spoken relatively, not in the way of substance.³⁰

What I have tried to show is there is no basis in the agnosticism charge against Augustine. We will shortly see what Calvin makes of this Augustinian tradition.

AND KANT?

Merold Westphal offers a version of the agnosticism thesis that differs somewhat from that of Gunton's account of Augustine.³¹ He appropriates the Kantian distinction between noumenon and phenomenon and claims that it corresponds with the distinction between God as he is in himself and God as he is towards us. God as he is in himself has knowledge and truth, that is absolute, unqualifiable knowledge of all that is true, whereas we ourselves, on the phenomenal side of God, so to speak, have knowledge that is perspectival and corrigible, of truths that are partial and may be biased if our cognitive apparatus is not functioning properly. 'Now, what Kant calls the phenomenal world is the world for us. Relative to the world for God it is subjective, but relative to the world for me it is objective.'³² Westphal suggests a number of variants of this; for example, he sketches a version of Kantianism that he attributes to Kierkegaard: 'It is a theistic

²⁸ See also *The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*, trans. J. F. Shaw (Chicago, Ill.: Regnery, 1961), 12,38.

²⁹ *Promise*, 41.

³⁰ *Promise*, 41. The quotation is from *On the Trinity*, V.11.

³¹ Westphal, *Overcoming Onto theology: Toward a Postmodern Christian Faith* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001).

³² Westphal, *Overcoming Onto theology*, 95.

view that equates the thing in itself with the thing as known by God. Thus it holds to an objectivist notion of truth . . . sin rather than finitude [is] the primary barrier between human and divine knowledge.³³ And so God himself is beyond the world for us, and hence unknowable by us. At least, that's one version of what Westphal says. At places he qualifies this in a rather significant way by saying that there are 'things that we need to know and, given our finitude and sinfulness, *cannot discover on our own*.'³⁴ There's a big difference between being necessarily ignorant of something and knowing something only with divine help, and perhaps an equally big difference between ignorance due to finitude and ignorance due to sin. No doubt, Westphal would not disagree, but it does not conduce to clarity to roll these things together.

Westphal claims that the Christian theistic tradition, including Calvin, essentially takes this view in its reference to mystery,³⁵ although quite naturally expressing these points in pre-Kantian conceptuality. We see through a glass darkly. This is certainly a technically neat claim. Kant's phenomenal world is a time-bound, space-bound business. God is beyond such time. Since for Kant all the categories of human understanding are schematized in terms of time and space, there is a great gulf fixed between human understanding and the divine, and we can only know things as they appear to us, never as they are in themselves.³⁶ God has complete knowledge of all that is true.³⁷ It is as if there is a bright light of such intensity that it presents itself to us as an inaccessible black hole. But can this gulf be bridged? Specifically, on Kant's view of what a noumenon is, can there be knowledge and activity on the noumenal side?

When God tells us about himself, is that misinformation? Of course the waters are muddied here by claims about scepticism or perspectivalism and the effect of sin, according to Westphal. It may be that due to sin we think we know what it is that God tells us of himself, but in fact we do not. Nevertheless, what we mistakenly think is the sort of thing God is telling us may be within a hair's-breadth of what he is in fact telling us. Maybe we have mistakenly inserted a negation at a critical point. But suppose we can get over this hurdle, the hurdle of sin. That assumes there is a positive

³³ *Overcoming Onto theology*, 102.

³⁴ *Overcoming Onto theology*, 98 (emphasis added).

³⁵ *Overcoming Onto theology*, 8.

³⁶ *Overcoming Onto theology*, 82.

³⁷ This is no longer to treat God as a regulative idea – the standard view of Kant scholars. Westphal believes that he can substantiate his case from the text of Kant (see Westphal, 'In Defense of the Thing in Itself', *Kantstudien*, 59/1 (1968), 118–41).

answer to the question ‘Could we ever know that what God tells us of himself is information and not misinformation?’ Calvin says that some of what God tells us is accommodated to us. God is represented as having ears, but he cannot have them, and so on. But is all that he tells us accommodated, is it all misinformation, according to Calvin?

In Calvin’s view, clearly not. And, returning to the great gulf, is it possible for human beings to know for certain what God tells us of himself? Indeed, can God, inhabiting the noumenal realm, ever talk to us? Can he cross the great gulf? Commenting on 1 Corinthians 13, ‘Now I know in part’, Calvin says that ‘the measure of our present knowledge is imperfect.’ This looks to be a remark about the amount, rather than the kind, of our knowledge; there is no equivocation between what we know now and what we will know then. ‘The knowledge of God, which we now have from his word, is indeed certain and true, and has nothing in it that is confused, or perplexed, or dark, but is spoken of as comparatively *obscure*, because it comes far short of that clear manifestation to which we look forward.’³⁸ If knowledge is never objective to a finite knower, then how will we ever know even as we are known, or know the love of God which passes knowledge? There’s also the case of the Incarnation. It is true that Calvin occasionally says that the Incarnation is an accommodation of God to us,³⁹ and by this he means that the mediator Jesus Christ is no doubt a figure in space and time. But in this accommodation does God tell us less what he is like than he tells us what he was like as pre-incarnate? For Calvin this would be an unfortunate result, I imagine.

Of course there’s a danger of anachronism here, of reading Calvin through a later, idealist lens. Nevertheless, we might take the Kantian distinction to be simply suggestive, a way of treating an aspect of Calvin’s religious epistemology that makes sense of it. Let us suppose that we take the challenge of objective knowledge to be: Were this statement ‘Helm is now drinking a cup of coffee’ to be taken by itself, could it be known to be true unqualifiedly? Or is it necessary that in order to know it for sure we must qualify it by also knowing all other propositions in their relation to it and it to them? Clearly if this is so, the game is up. But, as we have noted, Westphal occasionally seems to concede something by saying that it is sin rather than finitude that is the problem.⁴⁰ If so, then it is surely possible for us to know, in principle and sin apart, that Helm is now drinking a cup of coffee. And surely this and these sorts of things are among the things

³⁸ *Comm.* 1 Cor. 13: 12–13. See also his *Comm.* Eph. 3: 19.

³⁹ See, for example, his *Comm.* 1 Pet. 1: 21.

⁴⁰ *Overcoming Onto theology*, 103.

that we know for certain. There is also a possible confusion between ‘Necessarily, we cannot have complete knowledge of what is incomplete’ and ‘We cannot have any knowledge of what is necessarily incomplete.’

Sometimes otherwise careful students of Calvin have used language which implies that he is committed to the unknowability thesis in a strong form. We have already noted Colin Gunton’s appeal to the language of substratum in sketching Augustine’s alleged view that God’s essence is unknowable. In the case of Calvin something similar is to be found in Edward A. Dowey. In writing of the divine mystery he says:

To conclude, this concept of accommodation with respect to all knowledge of God, whether meant in principle for man as creature or as sinner, is the horizon of Calvin’s theology. He never ventured to attach anything but the name of incomprehensible mystery to what lay beyond that horizon, yet he maintained stoutly that it is God’s mystery, not an abyss of nothingness. The mystery belongs to the unknowable side of the known God. Such a phenomenalism in the hands of a speculative thinker could lead as easily to skepticism as to faith.⁴¹

And elsewhere, in referring to the opening words of book I of *Institutes*, Dowey suggests that Calvin is ‘here a kind of Kant, an epistemologist not a metaphysician.’⁴² Well, Calvin is a kind of epistemologist, but he is not a Kantian epistemologist. The attribution to Calvin of a kind of phenomenal–noumenal distinction suggests once again the substratum view of God’s essence, which we have encountered in Gunton’s view of Augustine: that Calvin held that the divine revelation can reveal nothing of God’s nature. But this is not Calvin’s position, as can easily be seen.⁴³ And although it is true that Calvin makes very full use of the idea of divine accommodation, and endorses Augustine’s reserve about speaking of the Trinity, he uses these ideas in different ways, ways that are not incompatible with God making himself known. Nevertheless, Dowey’s language adds to the suspicion that Calvin’s God must be wholly hidden.

CALVIN AND AUGUSTINE

It is time to bring Calvin back into the discussion. We have already noted one way in which Calvin explicitly follows Augustine’s Trinitarianism by taking a very restrained approach to how the term ‘person’ is to be used to characterize the threeness of the godhead. Despite occasional suggestions

⁴¹ *The Knowledge of God in Calvin’s Theology*, 3rd edn. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 17.

⁴² *Knowledge of God*, 8.

⁴³ Helm, *John Calvin’s Ideas*, ch. 1.

that Calvin had an Eastern approach to the Trinity,⁴⁴ the initial presumption must be that in this matter as in many others he closely follows his mentor Augustine, and so it will prove to be. He occasionally has a critical word for the use of analogies for the Trinity, drawn from the human self and so forth, to illuminate and vindicate its character, though he does not at this point refer to Augustine by name but to the ‘ancient fathers.’ Calvin regarded such analogies as inexpedient, and as somewhat presumptuous.⁴⁵ Perhaps Calvin thinks that Augustine and the others were not being as consistently restrained as they should have been.

In drawing out the similarities between the two we will concentrate upon a few central points. First, for Calvin, as for Augustine, God is a simple essence. He does not possess an essence (leading to questions such as ‘Who is the one who possesses such an essence?’ ‘What is he like?’), he is an essence, and he is essentially Trinitarian. (Calvin makes a characteristically Calvinian point here, that unless we are Trinitarian the name of God will be ‘bare and empty’ and will ‘flutter in the brain.’⁴⁶) The essence of God is ‘simple and undivided, and contained in himself alone.’ A feature (though not a part) of this simple essence is the threefold subsistence of the Father, Son, and Spirit. These subsistencies, though distinct from each other, are not distinctions in the essence, for they are the same essence, each being God himself.

This may appear to take Calvin in the direction of modalism, but in fact he takes the line characteristic of Augustine. The subsistencies are not divisions of the essence; nevertheless, they are distinct from each other, not because they in some way partition the essence, but because of their relations with each other. Each, in respect of the others, has a ‘peculiar property’; these properties are distinct and incommunicable (and so necessarily non-transferable) to either of the other two persons. These, Calvin stresses, are relational properties:

Here relation is distinctly expressed, because, when God is mentioned simply and indefinitely the name belongs not less to the Son and the Spirit than to the Father. But whenever the Father is compared with the Son, the peculiar property of each distinguishes the one from the other. Again, whatever is proper to each I affirm to be incommunicable, because nothing can apply or be transferred to the Son which is attributed to the Father as a mark of distinction.⁴⁷

Like Augustine, Calvin is also sensitive, even touchy, about issues of language, though in a manner which more reflects the Reformation

⁴⁴ See the discussion in Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas*, 50 1.

⁴⁵ *Inst.* I.13.18, cf. I.15.4.

⁴⁶ *Inst.* I.13.1.

⁴⁷ *Inst.* I.13.6.

issue of *sola scriptura*. First, he raises the issue in connection with the use of terms that are not directly lifted from the text of Scripture, like subsistence, and person. But such terms are safe, provided they draw out the implications of Scripture while at the same time safeguarding the mystery, both safeguarding its mysteriousness, and protecting us against false teaching about it. They explain the usage of Scripture, but do not attempt to explain the mystery.⁴⁸ Like Augustine, he also shows an irenic attitude over different usages—*persona*, hypostasis—as between the Eastern and Western Churches, and different usages among the Fathers themselves.⁴⁹

What is central to this particular discussion, however, is the question of visibility. The following argument is used. Since (for example) the Son was from the beginning God, and with God he has a substantial and permanent essence, he is God. In manifesting God, he thus manifests the essence of God, albeit in a way that is accommodated and adapted to our understanding and to our condition. The persons, particularly the Son, make God visible, and so the essence of God, which is God, is visible. These remarks are made as part of Calvin's discussion of the full deity of each person in *Institutes* I.13. Calvin very naturally emphasizes more than once the full deity of each. So in *Institutes* I.13.17 the trinity of persons is a distinction, not a division, in the divine essence; each is wholly God, therefore. In I.13.9 he stresses that the Trinitarian distinctions do not interfere with 'the most perfect unity of God.' He quotes Augustine on the relational character of the persons, and the reader is referred to book V of *On the Trinity* where Augustine deals *in extenso* with the relational character of the persons, a relationality that, he claims, does not compromise the full, essential deity of each. And, finally, Calvin stresses the point again: 'The Scriptures teach that there is essentially but one God, and therefore that the essence both of the Son and the Spirit is unbegotten . . . we do not disjoin the persons from the essence . . . If the persons were separated from the essence. . .'⁵⁰ None of the persons could be persons of the godhead if they were not each essentially God, the very one God. For various reasons God may be only partly visible to the creature, even 'incomprehensible.'⁵¹ Yet he is fully what he is in each of the three persons in a wholly undiminished way.

So if Augustine's doctrine of the divine essence is an assertion of divine visibility, of the divine glory, a glory only to be gazed at through smoked

⁴⁸ *Inst.* I.13.3.

⁴⁹ *Inst.* I.13.5.

⁵⁰ *Inst.* I.13.25.

⁵¹ *Inst.* I.13.1.

glass, and not of an unknowable substratum, and if Calvin endorses this doctrine of the divine essence, then we may reasonably conclude that he broadly endorses what we may (guardedly but truly) call the doctrine of divine visibility. Indeed, one might argue for a thesis that is precisely the opposite of Gunton's, that for Augustine and for Calvin it is not the divine essence that is an unknowable substratum, but (thinking of the immanent Trinity) it is the three persons that are unknown and the divine essence that is visible. Something like this inversion occurs in Anselm, who clearly echoes Augustine's outlook at this point.

So now, it is clear that it is to man's advantage to believe in this ineffable triple singularity and singular triplicity. One and a unity by virtue of the one essence, three and a Trinity by virtue of the three—three I-do-not-know-whats. I can say that it is a Trinity in virtue of Father, Son, and Spirit. Father, Son, and Spirit are three. I cannot however, offer one name for that in virtue of which these three are three, as I might, for instance, say three persons, and one substance. For they must not be thought of as three persons.⁵²

BARTH AND CALVIN

We now turn to a further, related charge against Calvin, made by Karl Barth, which requires that we focus on issues in Christology. This is not Christology in the narrow sense of an account of the nature of the God-man, but an account of how, according to Calvin, Christ figures in the divine economy, what his relationship is to the divine decrees, and of how, if at all, this affects our understanding of the person of Christ. So we move from issues regarding the immanent Trinity to issues about the place of the second person in the economy. Although the charges of agnosticism against Calvin's idea of God's essence may be successfully rebutted, it may still be held that what is made visible to us is not sufficiently Trinitarian, or is insufficiently Christian, in that the person of the Son as incarnate is somehow awkwardly and unnecessarily in the background. If so, then we are left with a God who though not altogether invisible is nonetheless not fully explicit.

So our way of addressing Calvin's Christology will focus on the relation of the Logos to human redemption, and in particular on the relation of the pre-incarnate Logos to the person and work of Jesus Christ. There are two areas of concern here. The first is how we are to understand the character

⁵² Anselm, *Monologion*, 79, in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, ed. with an introd. Brian Davies and Gillian Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 79. Anselm proceeds to refer to the practice of calling the three somethings three persons as a 'linguistic necessity'.

of the Logos when considered as logically prior to the Incarnation. The second concerns what if anything we can say positively about the character of this Logos in relation to what, in the Incarnation, the Logos is revealed to be.

According to Calvin God decrees human salvation through the Incarnation and redemptive ministry of the Logos. The Logos assumes human nature. Is he then fully revealed in human nature or is there some hiddenness, some remainder? According to Calvin, is the triune God of the *decretum absolutum* that in which the second person is *logos asarkos* and is logically prior to the divine decree that the Logos become incarnate?

There can be no real debate about Calvin's view. 'Although he was God before he became man, he did not therefore begin to be a new God. Nor is there any greater absurdity in holding that the Son of God, who by eternal generation ever had the property of being a Son, appeared in the flesh.' There is a distinction to be made between the eternal Logos, and the Incarnation. 'If it is true, as Paul says, that Christ always was the head, "the first-born of every creature—that in all things he might have the pre-eminence" (Col. 1.15, 18), I think I may legitimately infer, that he existed as the Son of God before the creation of the world.'⁵³

Thoroughly committed as he was to the Chalcedonian conceptuality, according to Calvin the Logos is unchangeably divine, even while he is incarnate, and a fortiori he is the Logos at the point of the Incarnation. And he understands this divinity in terms of the doctrine of Trinitarian theism. Calvin is committed to what, in the context of debates about the Lord's Supper, came to be called the *extra Calvinisticum*, the view that in the Incarnation God the Son, being *autotheos*, retained all essential divine properties, including immensity and omnipresence, and therefore could not be confined within the limits of a human person. It is disputed whether this view is unique to Calvin. In his excellent study *Calvin's Catholic Christology*⁵⁴ E. David Willis shows that the *extra Calvinisticum* might equally well be called the *extra Catholicum*, citing statements of it (or of its equivalent) from a host of Christian writers from Athanasius to Aquinas. So, at least on the strength of this evidence, the position that we will discuss represents an important strand of Christian orthodoxy.⁵⁵

In the *Institutes* Calvin refers explicitly to the *extra* in two places. First, in his discussion of the Incarnation in book II:

⁵³ *Inst.* II.14.5.

⁵⁴ (Leiden: Brill, 1966).

⁵⁵ Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas*, ch. 3.

Another absurdity which they obtrude upon us, i.e. that if the Word of God became incarnate, it must have been enclosed in the narrow tenement of an earthly body, is sheer petulance. For although the boundless essence of the Word was united with human nature into one person, we have no idea of any enclosing. The Son of God descended miraculously from heaven, yet without abandoning heaven; was pleased to be conceived miraculously in the Virgin's womb, to live on the earth, and hang upon the cross, and yet always filled the world as from the beginning.⁵⁶

Second, in his discussion of the nature of the Lord's Supper in book IV:

But some are so hurried away by contention as to say, that on account of the union of natures in Christ, wherever his divinity is, there his flesh, which cannot be separated from it, is also . . . But it is clearly gathered from Scripture that the one person of Christ is composed of two natures, but so that each has its peculiar properties unimpaired . . . Certainly when Paul says of the princes of this world that they 'crucified the Lord of glory' (I Cor. 2.8), he means not that he suffered anything in his divinity, but that Christ, who was rejected and despised, and suffered in the flesh, was likewise God and the Lord of glory. In this way, both the Son of man was in heaven because he was also Christ; and he who, according to the flesh, dwelled as the Son of man on earth, was also God in heaven. For this reason, he is said to have descended from heaven in respect of his divinity, not that his divinity quitted heaven to conceal itself in the prison of the body, but because, although he filled all things, it yet resided in the humanity of Christ corporeally, that is, naturally, and in an ineffable manner. There is a trite distinction in the schools which I hesitate not to quote. Although the whole Christ is everywhere, yet everything which is in him, is not everywhere. I wish the Schoolmen had duly weighed the force of this sentence, as it would have obviated their absurd fiction of the corporeal presence of Christ.⁵⁷

The scholastic distinction which Calvin quotes approvingly he takes to be a reference to the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ. As God, Christ is wholly everywhere, but 'the whole of what is in him', namely his human nature, is not similarly, in virtue of the union with the divine person, everywhere. If that distinction had been observed, then, Calvin thinks, it would have ruled out the doctrine of transubstantiation. The distinction that Calvin appeals to is undoubtedly obscure. More attention will be given to it in Chapter 9, when considering Calvin's views about the metaphysics of the ascended and glorified Christ.

A second aspect of the question, the issue of divine freedom, though it involves matters that are far from straightforward, can be straightforwardly answered. Calvin was an eternalist. He believed, along with his mentor

⁵⁶ *Inst.* II.13.4.

⁵⁷ *Inst.* IV.17.30.

Augustine, that God is outside time. To be sure, if Calvin thinks of the Son as existing timelessly, this Incarnation cannot be expressed in terms of time. We cannot say that the Logos became (at a time in his own life line) incarnate, that there was a time in the life of the Logos when he was not incarnate. The distinction between not being incarnate and being incarnate has to be understood in terms of a logical moment, a distinction of the reason, not a temporal moment—not one marked by the occurrence of an event. Nevertheless, the presence of such a distinction enables Calvin (and us) to think of the Incarnation as something that is to be conceptually distinguished from the Logos considered in himself, and (as we will see) to think of the decree to become incarnate, and the Incarnation itself, as the results of a free decision, a decision that might have been other than it was. His assuming of human nature is therefore not something essential to him, as being immeasurable is essential to him.

Bruce McCormack rightly says that for Calvin and for the Reformed tradition ‘there is a distinction between the Logos as he appears in the eternal plan of God (predestination) and the Logos as he appears in the actual execution of that plan in time.’⁵⁸ But just as we must suppose a logical moment between the Logos and his Incarnation, so we may suppose a logical moment before the divine decree to become incarnate in the person of the Son. So there is a more basic distinction, between the Logos prior to the eternal plan of God, and the Logos in that plan. What this last distinction implies is that according to Calvin it is not necessary that there should be grace and mercy for sinners. The gracious plan of redemption is the result of God’s free choice, which results in a ‘freely given promise’,⁵⁹ a choice in which the Logos participates, and in accordance with which he freely undertakes to be the mediator and to execute the plan of God, his plan, in time.

This position is the result of a complex of ideas in Calvin. As we will see later, in Chapter 6, he is not committed to the unconditional necessity of the Incarnation, and not always to its conditional necessity either. The necessity to redeem, he says ‘flowed from the divine decree on which the salvation of man depended.’⁶⁰ God freely chose to redeem, and Calvin thinks that he could have pardoned in more than one way. So, along with

⁵⁸ Bruce L. McCormack, ‘Grace and Being: The Role of God’s Gracious Election in Karl Barth’s Theological Ontology’, in John Webster (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 94.

⁵⁹ *Inst.* III.2.30. Cf. Calvin’s celebrated definition of faith: *Inst.* III.2.7. ‘Freely’ here may connote not only choice but also liberality.

⁶⁰ *Inst.* II.12.1.

Catholic orthodoxy, Calvin affirms that the Incarnation is contingent in both the fact of its occurrence and its precise mode. So the Logos was free not to become incarnate. Any additional choice that the Logos was free to make, say the choice to become incarnate through some other virgin than the Virgin Mary, is of course of secondary importance.⁶¹

So for Calvin to deny divine freedom in the act of Incarnation would be at odds with the freeness of God's grace which is so central to his evangelical theology—freeness not only in the sense that redemption is bountiful, but also in the sense that there was nothing in fallen creation that necessitated that God act graciously, and also because such grace is (according to God's unfathomable election) freely bestowed on some human beings and not on others. God could have justly withheld his mercy, and he could justly be merciful to Smith rather than to Jones. And he could justly have redeemed everyone.⁶² The assertion 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy' (Rom. 9: 15) is foundational for Calvin, even if Jacob, the object of such mercy, is thought to refer only to that person's role in the historic covenant with Israel and not to his eternal election as an individual (and Calvin quite naturally took it to refer to both):

But who, I ask, can deny the right of God to have the free and uncontrolled disposal of his gifts, to select the nations which he may be pleased to illuminate, the places which he may be pleased to illustrate by the preaching of his word, and the mode and measure of progress and success which he may be pleased to give to his doctrine—to punish the world for its ingratitude by withdrawing the knowledge of his name for certain ages, and again, when he so pleases, to restore it in mercy?⁶³

Karl Barth held that the affirmation by Calvin and the tradition of the theses about God and freedom, including his freedom in establishing a covenant of grace, leads to speculation. It is not clear why this is, or what precisely the speculation is.⁶⁴ We will take it that Barth is referring to speculation about God and his will. Did it lead Calvin to speculate in this fashion? Initially, it may seem so. In remarks on the righteousness of God's

⁶¹ The idea of an alternative choice of a timeless eternal God is somewhat rarified, to say the least. In 'Ockham and the Creation of a Beginningless World' (*Franciscan Studies*, 45 (1985), 1–31) Norman Kretzmann throws considerable light on medieval discussions of such questions as 'Could God have chosen not to create the world?' and 'Could God have chosen not to create a world that had no beginning?'

⁶² For discussion of this issue see Oliver Crisp, 'Augustinian Universalism', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 53 (2003), 127–45.

⁶³ *Inst.* II.11.14.

⁶⁴ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1956), IV.1.181.

will Calvin claims that in the matter of election and reprobation God's will is the rule of all righteousness, and this may seem to sanction speculation. For it may lead us to ask what might God will, or have willed:

For if his will has any cause, there must be something antecedent to it, and to which it is annexed; this it were impious to imagine. The will of God is the supreme rule of righteousness, so that everything which he wills must be held to be righteous by the mere fact of his willing it. Therefore, when it is asked why the Lord did so, we must answer, Because he pleased. But if you proceed further to ask why he pleased, you ask for something greater and more sublime than the will of God, and nothing such can be found.⁶⁵

But note the bold qualification:

We, however, give no countenance to the fiction of absolute power, which, as it is heathenish, so it ought justly to be held in detestation by us. We do not imagine God to be lawless. He is a law to himself; because, as Plato says, men labouring under the influence of concupiscence need law; but the will of God is not only free from all vice, but is the supreme standard of perfection, the law of all laws. But we deny that he is bound to give an account of his procedure; and we moreover deny that we are fit of our own ability to give judgment in such a case.⁶⁶

So whatever freedom the divine decree may sanction in respect of a God 'elsewhere', Calvin is clear that we cannot speculate about such a God as if he were a 'lawless' God. His attitude to such speculation is borne out by his remarks on the ill-advisedness of pitting God's might against his truth⁶⁷ and of not separating justice from power,⁶⁸ and by his insistence that the divine ordinances are just, even though this justice may be presently hidden from us.⁶⁹ And it is underscored by his principled avoidance of theological 'What if?' questions.

Yet, for Calvin, though God is certainly not 'elsewhere' in being lawless, he is hidden in other senses, as noted earlier. His essence is incomprehensible, yet he reveals himself, his nature, to us. Our minds cannot encompass his mind. And his will, what he decrees, is usually secret, not disclosed to us in advance, and even if what he wills is disclosed, the reasons he has for willing what he does may remain hidden.⁷⁰

Calvin's overall position, then, is that we are not to attempt to go behind God's decree, using the doctrine of the pre-incarnate Logos or anything else to do so, in order to speculate on what God in his power,

⁶⁵ *Inst.* III.23.2.

⁶⁶ *Inst.* III.23.2.

⁶⁷ *Inst.* II.7.5.

⁶⁸ *Inst.* I.17.2.

⁶⁹ *Inst.* III.23.9.

⁷⁰ For further discussion see Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas*, chs. 1 and 4.

either the power of God's will in abstraction from his nature, or of the entire divine nature, might have decreed. The exception to this is the atonement, as we will see in Chapter 6, but even here, in supposing alternative ways of atonement, Calvin is not setting out on a train of independent speculation, but simply endorsing the view of Augustine. Even though he allows that there might have been other avenues of salvation than the actual one, he spends no time in dwelling speculatively on the details of how God might have saved other than through the Cross. It is for this reason also that Calvin condemns as 'madness' the speculation of some, such as Ockham, over whether the Son of God could have taken upon himself the nature of an ass.⁷¹ Here's one clear sense in which Calvin will not contemplate an 'other' God, a God 'elsewhere'; namely, where this God is a God of pure will, of absolute power divorced from his essence, divorced particularly from the so-called 'moral' attributes.

But does he contemplate an 'other' God in some weaker sense, and so fail to avoid Barth's strictures? This leads us to a second question: According to Calvin, is the Logos of the *decretum absolutum* 'hidden' or 'undetermined'? I will try to show that in any clear sense of the question the answer is 'No.'

Barth himself held that *God freely reveals himself and that this revelation of himself is solely and exhaustively in Jesus Christ*. According to him this is the result of God's 'primal and basic decision'

in which He wills to be and actually is God, in the mystery of what takes place from and to all eternity within Himself, within His triune being, God is none other than the One who in His Son or Word elects Himself, and in and with Himself elects His people.⁷²

This is Barth's doctrine of the *visibility* of God. He intends it to be in stark contrast to Calvin's view of the divine hiddenness, as we will see. We will now endeavour to examine this and similarly worded claims in Barth, to see, in the first place, what he believed that such statements entail and what they exclude or are incompatible with.

Barth held that in working out the implications of such statements Christian theology comes into its own, because at all points it is explicitly and immediately connected with Christ's person and work, and that the appreciation of this fact is something of a novel discovery, an 'innovation'

⁷¹ *Inst.* II.12.5. This reminds us that Barth's fear of speculation is matched by Calvin's own. For further discussion see Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas*, ch. 1.

⁷² *CD* II.2.76; see also 115, 158. (In this chapter we will chiefly consider material from II.2 of the *CD*, but also refer to iv.1.)

in Christian theology.⁷³ So the italicized words above embody a theological claim of some magnitude. A corollary of the claim, according to Barth, is that the tradition, lacking this new insight, inevitably espoused the idea of a ‘hidden’ God, a God who is not exhaustively revealed in Jesus Christ, and who is therefore not a fully Christian God. It follows that those who have failed to appreciate the importance of divine visibility—I will refer to them in the rest of this chapter as ‘the tradition’—have a radically defective view of God. In offering what I hope will be a careful and sympathetic account of Barth’s views, my principal aim is to examine the cogency and coherence of Barth’s proposal against the tradition, Calvin’s tradition, which he critiques. The conclusions are somewhat paradoxical: it turns out, on each of two plausible readings of what he says, that Barth is himself a part of the tradition which he believes that he has supplanted.

Barth’s critique of God’s ‘hiddenness’ and his affirmation of his visibility are chiefly to be found in his treatment of election and of the person of Christ.⁷⁴ We will look at these in order. Finally, we will consider what he has to say about certainty and scepticism about God’s salvific intentions, something which preoccupies him throughout his criticisms of divine hiddenness.

Election has a fundamental importance in Barth’s theology which it would be hard to exaggerate. It is ‘the sum of the Gospel.’⁷⁵ Election is God’s election of himself in Jesus Christ, and this for Barth conditions the entire character of Christian theology. More strongly, not only does election have this basicity, but reprobation has a similar though not identical fundamental character. For it is God’s reprobation of himself in Jesus Christ that also contributes crucially to theology’s avowedly Christian character. Jesus Christ is the eternally reprobate one, just as he is the eternally elect one. He embodies both grace and judgement, divine mercy and divine wrath. In him divine mercy triumphs over divine wrath. About the God who thus elects and reprobates Jesus Christ, Barth has this sort of thing to say:

⁷³ *CD* II.2.77.

⁷⁴ Barth also deals with the theme of ‘hiddenness’ in *CD* II.1 (179–203). But here the word is being used in an epistemic sense. It concerns the mode of God’s revelation. Barth’s point is that we have no natural capacity to know God. Such knowledge cannot be identified with any human cognitive process or its result. So God comes to us in a way that is discontinuous with our normal cognitive powers. This ‘hiddenness’ does not signal a general agnosticism about God, and it is not in any way at odds with the subject of this chapter. ‘In this revelation, in Jesus Christ, the hidden God has indeed made himself apprehensible’ (p. 199).

⁷⁵ *CD* II.2.2.

The Subject of the election, of this election, the Subject with which the Christian doctrine of election must reckon, is not in the least a 'God in general', as he may be conceived and systematically constructed from the standpoint of sovereignty, of omnipotence, of a first cause, of absolute necessity. It is always unconditioned thinking which undertakes to construct such a 'God in general', and (notwithstanding all the theoretical protestation against *potentia absoluta*) the result of such unconditioned thinking must always be an unconditioned God, a God who is free *in abstracto* . . . [T]he true God is the One whose freedom and love have nothing to do with abstract absoluteness or naked sovereignty, but who in His love and freedom has determined and limited Himself to be God in particular and not in general, and only as such to be omnipotent and sovereign and the possessor of all other perfections.⁷⁶

And as regards reprobation:

We are no longer free, then, to think of God's eternal election as bifurcating into a rightward and a leftward election. There is a leftward election. But God willed that the object of this election should be Himself and not man. God removed from man and took upon Himself the burden of the evil which unavoidably threatened and actually achieved and exercised dominion in the world that He had ordained as the theatre of His glory. God removed from man and took upon Himself the suffering which resulted from this dominion, including the condemnation of sinful man.⁷⁷

So we must not think of God firstly or chiefly as a sovereign ruler, not even as a wise and faithful sovereign ruler, and of divine election as but one activity of that rule, subordinated to it.⁷⁸ Otherwise we are landed with a God whose providence and predestination is hidden.⁷⁹ We must begin with true, concrete deity, not a God 'in general',⁸⁰ not deity *in abstracto*.⁸¹ What an 'abstract' God or a 'God in general' are is not immediately clear, but I think that Barth means a God whose character does not specify his salvific activities. Such a God is thus partly if not wholly invisible, and it is only in his own proposal, Barth thinks, that we have a thoroughly Christian and therefore a thoroughly satisfactory account of how God is visible, and of the nature of that visibility. Abstractness entails invisibility, concreteness entails visibility. It is only through the character of divine election that the character of God is fully revealed, and not (rather surprisingly) the other way around:

⁷⁶ CD II.2.49.

⁷⁷ CD II.2.172.

⁷⁸ CD. II.2.50.

⁷⁹ CD II.2.51.

⁸⁰ CD II.2.49.

⁸¹ CD II.2.44 5.

It is undoubtedly the case . . . that the election does in some sense denote the basis of all the relationships between God and man, between God in His very earliest movement towards man and man in his very earliest determination by this divine movement. It is in the decision in favour of this movement, in God's self-determination and the resultant determination of man, in the basic relationship which is enclosed and fulfilled within Himself, that God is who He is. The primal relationship belongs, therefore, to the doctrine of God.⁸²

So God is abstract, a 'God in general' if and only if he could have had salvific relationships with humankind other than those he has in fact had (or, presumably, had he entirely refrained from adopting salvific intentions of any kind). Further, the election of Jesus Christ is not the appointment of a mere executor of a divine decree. He is the subject or agent of election. He is elected, but in the person of Jesus Christ God also elects himself:

As we have to do with Jesus Christ, we have to do with the electing God. For election is obviously the first and basic and decisive thing which we have always to say concerning this revelation, this activity, this presence of God in the world, and therefore concerning the eternal decree and the eternal self-determination of God which bursts through and is manifested at this point.⁸³

It is for this reason that predestination cannot for Barth be a part of providence: it is the whole of providence. For if it were a part of providence then God would be a God 'in general', since he would have providential concerns that his election and predestination of Christ did not encompass, and predestination and election would be merely one aspect of God's overall relationship with the world.⁸⁴

Is God the most perfect being? Barth answers: 'Yes, he is.' But his perfections are not the set of Anselmic 'abstract' perfections, a 'God in general' but the concrete perfections of a God who is *this* God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Any divine decree issues, naturally enough, in a limitation of God. But this is not Barth's point. Rather, there is only one limitation that 'befits' God. Nevertheless, we will see that Barth regards such a limitation as at the same time the free determination of God, and so gets himself into trouble.

One might think that Augustine's and the Reformers' insistence that election is *in Christ* is Barth's point. For theirs is a view of election that is not 'general'; their God is not abstract, for the electing God is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. But Barth demurs:

⁸² CD II.2.52.

⁸³ CD II.2.54.

⁸⁴ CD II.2.78.

Our thesis is that God's eternal will is the election of Jesus Christ. At this point we part company with all previous interpretations of the doctrine of predestination. In these the Subject and object of predestination (the electing God and elected man) are determined ultimately by the fact that both quantities are treated as unknown.⁸⁵

We see here what Barth means by election being basic.⁸⁶ It means that there is a broadly logically necessary and sufficient connection between who God is and his decision of election in Christ. God is the God who reveals *himself* in Christ. So it appears that God in his self-determination acts so as to ensure that he is the elector of Jesus Christ. So this is decretal theology, but the decree in question is not secret but necessarily revealed. That gives God his identity, or, rather, this *is* the identity of God. So when, for Barth, God reveals himself, it *must be* this revelation in Jesus Christ that constitutes God's character:⁸⁷

Is it the case, then, that in the divine election as such we have to do ultimately, not with a divine decision made in Jesus Christ, but with one which is independent of Jesus Christ and only executed by Him? Is it the case that that decision made in Jesus Christ by which we must hold fast is, in fact, only another and a later and subordinate decision, while the first and true decision of election is to be sought—or if we follow the pastoral direction had better not be sought—in the mystery of the self-existent being of God, and of a decree made in the absolute freedom of this divine being?

If in any sense we are forced to accept this second interpretation, it is inevitable that there should be tension between the theological truth and the pastoral direction which would have us hold fast by Christ. And in this tension it is the latter which will feel the strain the more seriously. It is only those who accidentally have not experienced or suspected the existence of the hidden truth who can really be satisfied with the advice simply to hold fast by the incarnate Son of God and the Word and Spirit of God and not enquire concerning the hidden will of the Father or of the eternal Godhead.⁸⁸

But, as we will see, matters do not work out for Barth straightforwardly because of the tangles that he gets into over divine freedom.

We see another side of his view in his critique of the doctrine of double predestination. As already noted, for Barth Christ is both the elect one and the reprobate one. Yet these two characterizations are not to be understood symmetrically, or in such a way that one neutralizes the other. Rather, as the elect one, Christ triumphs over his own reprobation so

⁸⁵ CD II.2.146; see also 63.

⁸⁶ CD II.2.77.

⁸⁷ CD II.2.66.

⁸⁸ CD II.2.64.

that no others suffer, or need suffer, the fate of being reprobate. 'For the only knowledge which we have of man's foreordination to evil and death is in the form in which God of His great mercy accepted it as His own portion and burden, removing it from us and refusing to let it be our foreordination in any form. That removing and refusing took place in Jesus Christ.'⁸⁹ This is in sharp contrast to the tradition, for whom 'the elect' and 'the reprobate' constitute two exclusive classes of people which together are exhaustive of the human race.

What is interesting and at first sight puzzling about Barth's method is how a priori it is. But on further reflection this a priori approach is in fact inevitable. For Scripture is largely de facto, informing us of what is the case, of what God has in fact done and revealed to us. The question of what God might have done but hasn't, or whether God had to do what he did, is rarely if ever considered there. By contrast, Barth is concerned to go back to first principles, to the basics, and to argue what *must* be the case. He is in effect asking and attempting to answer the question: What basic character *must* theology have to be Christian theology? In a different context, one that showed greater regard for the very words of Scripture in determining doctrine, such an approach would have been regarded as purely speculative.

If there were a contingent, merely accidental connection between God and our election in Christ it would follow according to Barth that the fact of election in Christ could only perform an epistemic role, and a poor one at that. This is because our relation to Christ could only be probabilistically related to God's character, it would not entail that God has that character.

But is not Christ the mirror of God's election for Calvin also?

But if we are elected in him, we cannot find the certainty of our election in ourselves; and not even in God the Father, if we look at him apart from the Son. Christ, then, is the mirror in which we ought, and in which, without deception, we may contemplate our election. For since it is into his body that the Father has decreed to engraft those whom from eternity he wished to be his, that he may regard as sons all whom he acknowledges to be his members, if we are in communion with Christ, we have proof sufficiently clear and strong that we are written in the Book of Life.⁹⁰

According to Barth, to follow Calvin's advice to regard Christ as the mirror of election could at best turn our attention away from the abyss of God's hiddenness, distracting us from the contemplation of God's 'left hand.' In

⁸⁹ *CD* II.2.172.

⁹⁰ *Inst.* III.24.5.

these circumstances it seems that belief in our election in Christ would not entail our election, for such an election is contingent. It is, in these circumstances (according to Barth), the result of a *decretum absolutum*, a decision apart from Christ, the will of a hidden God, and our belief in our election in Christ may thus turn out to be false. In these circumstances there would be a merely contingent relation between God and our election in Christ, for God could have acted otherwise, and might in fact have done so. But then who is this God who could have acted otherwise? Barth's answer: He is a hidden God.

Let us think a little more about what Barth means or might mean by 'the hiddenness of God.' He certainly does not mean that on the traditional view God is an unknowable substratum, or at best an abstract divine substance. For even as 'hidden', God is 'omnipotence, righteousness and mercy.' We can also see that the hiddenness of God for Barth is not a matter of degree. For the God of 'omnipotence, righteousness and mercy' is clearly not a *totally* hidden God. Yet Barth's contrast between the 'abstract' and the 'particular' is not altogether clear. For obviously a God who is understood in terms of the possession of 'abstract' powers in the Barthian sense is not himself abstract. Anselm's 'most perfect being', the sum of all perfections, is concrete, unique. But he is, nevertheless, for Barth, a 'God in general' because his nature is insufficiently specified in explicitly Christian, salvific terms. Hiddenness, the absence of particularity, has to do with the character of God's decree or decision. So God is hidden, not fully revealed as the God he is, if he is not exhaustively revealed in Christ. For in this case there is, apart from his revelation in Christ, a remainder, something over. If it is conceivable that God could have acted in some other way, decreed some other states of affairs than those he has in fact decreed, then to this extent God would be hidden. If God *makes himself* a particular God, no longer hidden, by the primal decision that he takes, his decision to be our God in Jesus Christ, then he is no longer a hidden God. This brings us to a consideration of the character of God's decision, his freedom.

The Christian tradition has maintained, by and large, that God does have such freedom, freedom to decree between alternatives.⁹¹ He is free to create or not to create, free to create and not to redeem. Such freedom has generally been upheld, even if sometimes in a qualified way. It has been argued, for example (by Aquinas, according to Norman Kretzmann⁹²),

⁹¹ William Rowe, *Can God be Free?* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004).

⁹² *The Metaphysics of Creation: Aquinas's Natural Theology in Summa Contra Gentiles II* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), ch. 4.

that though God in his overflowing generosity and benevolence must create *some* world, he need not have created *this* world. So even on this view God is free to choose between alternatives. To deny such freedom of choice to God is generally believed to take one in the direction of pantheism, or of panentheism,⁹³ to the idea that the world is a natural extension of God which is in some sense 'contained' within him.

Barth stoutly upholds the freedom of God, repeatedly stressing his 'free, subjective self-determination, the primal act of lordship over everything else':⁹⁴

The eternal God was not under an obligation to man to be in Himself the God whose nature and property it is to bear this name. That He is, in fact, such a God is grace, something which is not merited by man but can only be given to him. And that God is gracious, that in assuming this name He gives Himself to the man who has not merited it, is His election, His free decree. It is the divine election of grace. In a free act of determination God has ordained concerning Himself: He has determined Himself.⁹⁵

It may be granted, with Barth, that God is free in the sense that he is under no obligation to do what he does. But could he have done other than he did? On Barth's view of God's visibility it does not seem to be possible. For if God could have done other than he has done then there is a 'remainder', a hiddenness, to his character. Yet to say that God is not free would be to go against almost the entire tradition. So our question is: How can God both be free in what he does and yet not remain a 'hidden' God? How can God determine himself? Who is the God who determines himself? What character does he have? Is he, for all Barth's protestations to the contrary, a God in general? What is the character of this free decree or decision or self-determination?

While upholding divine freedom Barth nevertheless seems to tell two contrasting stories about it. According to the main story he has a rather unusual sense of 'freedom' as this applies to God. The highest form of freedom, and thus the only form possible for God, is not the freedom between alternative courses of action, nor even the freedom to be oneself, free of all external constraints or conditions, but the freedom (unconstrained by any external impediments) to decide to be *this* God. As Barth says:

[W]e maintain of God that in Himself, in the primal and basic decision in which He wills to be and actually is God, in the mystery of what takes place from and to

⁹³ See John Cooper, *Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2006).

⁹⁴ CD II.2.100.

⁹⁵ CD II.2.101.

all eternity within Himself, with His triune being, God is none other than the One who in His Son or Word elects Himself, and in and with Himself elects his people. In so far as God not only is love, but loves, in the act of love which determines His whole being God elects. And in so far as this act of love is an election, it is at the same time and as such the act of His freedom.⁹⁶

Note here Barth's reference to the mysterious character of God's eternal decision. But it is not as if, in using such an expression, he intends 'hiddenness' to return by the back door. Rather, as he puts it elsewhere, '[w]e have to do with this mystery too—the mystery of God, and the mystery of man which arises as man is caught up by the eternal will of God into God's own mystery. But what matters here is really the nature of this one and twofold mystery, whether it is incomprehensible light or incomprehensible darkness.'⁹⁷ God's mystery is the mystery of incomprehensible light. But of course a God of incomprehensible light might also be a hidden God in the sense that Barth deplors. So the question is: *Who* is this God who elects himself? Is he not a hidden God? If Barth replies 'This God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit', the tradition agrees. If he says 'This God is *behind* or *before* his Trinitarian self', he seems to commit himself to an exaggerated form of 'hiddenness', one not endorsed by the tradition, and one that is incoherent. Let us call this the *self-constituting* view of God's freedom.

However, while the self-constituting view is undoubtedly the main thrust of Barth's view of freedom, there is another aspect to it, perhaps (as Barth himself might call it) a 'shadow', but real for all that. For example, in discussing the idea of double predestination, and his opposition to the traditional idea of reprobation, he says:

But the emphatic nature of our opposition does not derive from any preconceived idea that the love of God prevents His equal willing of both [blessedness and perdition], thus excluding any such symmetrical understanding of double predestination. What right have we to tell God that in His love, which is certainly quite different from ours, He cannot equally seriously, and from the very beginning, from all eternity, condemn as well as acquit, kill as well as make alive, reject as well as elect? Even today we must still defend the older doctrine against this kind of objection.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ CD II.2.76. This interpretation of Barth's view of divine freedom is defended by Bruce L. McCormack in 'Grace and Being'.

⁹⁷ CD II.2.146.

⁹⁸ CD II.2.171; see also 166. For further discussion of this, and a partial defence of this interpretation of Barth, see Paul D. Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity* (London: Clark, 2002).

Without here going into the issue of predestination itself, but simply considering what implication these words have for Barth's understanding of divine freedom, it seems clear that if what Barth asserts here is true, God could have willed a different order of things than the one that he in fact ordained. He cannot now ordain it, of course, but 'from the very beginning, from eternity' he could have. This is surely an instance of the freedom to choose between alternatives. So such passages strongly suggest a second story, another view of divine freedom: that God is free in that he may choose man as his covenant partner or to refrain from doing so. This second view certainly has much more in common with Calvin. But does this view not entail a measure of hiddenness in the sense that Barth wishes to avoid?

Here we must briefly return to the theme of the pre-incarnate Logos, because Barth's critique of hiddenness in his treatment of election is reinforced by what he has to say regarding the person of Christ and particularly by his negative remarks about the *extra Calvinisticum*. Here Barth is in explicit dialogue with Calvin.

This is what Barth says about the *extra Calvinisticum*:

We may concede that there is something unsatisfactory about the theory [of the *extra Calvinisticum*], in that right up to our own day it has led to fatal speculation about the being and work of the *logos asarkos*, or a God whom we think we can know elsewhere, and whose divine being we can define from elsewhere than in and from the contemplation of His presence and activity as the Word made flesh.⁹⁹

I have been arguing that in his protests against Calvin's view of divine freedom as the basis of divine 'hiddenness' Barth himself offers two conflicting accounts of freedom. One of these is remarkably like the traditional view. The other, that election in Jesus Christ is constitutive of the very being of God, appears to be incoherent. If Calvin's view of divine freedom leads to a God who is hidden, then so does Barth's. But in fact the charge that Calvin's God is hidden is somewhat exaggerated, as we will now remind ourselves.

CALVIN AGAIN

Barth suggests a connection between what he takes to be Calvin's position and something he calls 'fatal speculation' because it entails a God whose being we can 'define' (note Barth's word) apart from the Incarnation. But shortly we will see that this charge goes against both the spirit and the letter of what Calvin says.

⁹⁹ CD iv. I.181.

Here, for example, are some of Calvin's comments on Hebrews 1: 3:

When, therefore, thou hearest that the Son is the brightness of the Father's glory, think thus with thyself, that the glory of the Father is invisible until it shines forth in Christ, and that he is called the impress of his substance, because the majesty of the Father is hidden until it shews itself impressed as it were on his image.¹⁰⁰

Calvin asserts the closest possible concurrence between the Father and the Son in the work of our redemption, as when he says:

But, as many as were at last incorporated into the body of Christ were God's sheep, as Christ Himself testifies (Jn. 10.16), though formerly wandering sheep and outside the fold. Meantime, though they did not know it, the shepherd knew them, according to that eternal predestination by which He chose His own before the foundation of the world, as Augustine rightly declares.¹⁰¹

So who is the agent, or, to use Barth's term, the subject of predestination, according to Calvin here? Not the Father, or at least not the Father in distinction from the Son, a God 'elsewhere.' The Son himself, the shepherd, chose his own before the foundation of the world. He is the agent of election, he eternally chose his own and as a good shepherd laid down his life for the sheep. But not in a way which separates him one smidgen from the Father. So although the Father is in certain important respects 'hidden', he is no more nor less hidden than the Son, and in equally important respects he is most clearly visible. So Barth's appreciation of the tradition is somewhat exaggerated, as is the contrast between his own success at eliminating 'hiddenness' and the tradition's failure to do so.

If the Logos chose his own how could he fail to collaborate with the Father? In his anxiety to carry the Christological character of election through theologically (as he puts it¹⁰²) Barth is sometimes guilty of non sequiturs. His point (made contra Heinrich Bullinger and the Helvetic Confession) is not proved by noting that 'in John's Gospel the electing Father and the electing Son are one and the same.'¹⁰³ For, that fact is well understood by the tradition. It does not follow from this, however, that there is no hiddenness in God, both Father and Son. The *en aut* of Ephesians 1: 4 or the *houtos* of John 1: 2 are not decisively in his favour,

¹⁰⁰ *Comm.* Heb. 1: 3.

¹⁰¹ *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (1552), trans. with an introd. J. K. S. Reid (London: Clarke, 1961), 150; cf. 127. See also his *Comm.* on John 13: 18. Such an understanding of the relation of the Son to the Father in the economy is fundamental to 'covenant theology'. For more on Calvin's view of God's visibility see Randall C. Zachman, *John Calvin as Teacher, Pastor and Theologian* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2006), 213-15.

¹⁰² *CD* iv.2.65. ¹⁰³ *CD* iv.2.65.

as Barth claims. For they are quite consistent, for example, with Calvin's view that they refer to the participation of the Logos in the eternal counsel of redemption. These scriptural points raised by Barth can also be appropriated by Calvin and the traditional understanding of *in Christo*. But what about other data not alluded to by Barth? What about the biblical data on particularism, or on reprobation? Barth makes no attempt to appropriate these data, and it is doubtful that he could do so consistently.

Are such statements of Calvin's references only to the economy, as Bruce McCormack thinks?¹⁰⁴ Perhaps they are, or are partly. But my points are rather different. First, that there is a clear sense in which, in the economy, the Son is not subordinated to the Father. The work that his Father has given him to do is also the work that he has given himself to do. Further, in respect of hiddenness and visibility, whatever is true of the Father is true of the Son. If the Father is to some degree hidden then so is the Son, in precisely the same way; if the Father is to some degree visible, then so is the Son, in precisely the same way. They operate in parallel and are to that degree the same; they are, after all, persons of the one God. Besides, it is pure speculation to suppose that in their hiddenness the Father and the Son are able to adopt altogether different characters—to be malign, or capricious, for example—or to suppose that, by virtue of a residual hiddenness, in the economy the Son could have failed to have cooperated with the Father.

In Letter 11 Augustine writes that according to the Catholic faith the Trinity is proposed to our belief and believed 'as so inseparable that whatever action is performed by it must be thought to be performed at the same time by the Son and by the Holy Spirit.'¹⁰⁵ I do not know of anywhere where Calvin expressly commits himself to the tag *opera externa sunt indivisa*; nevertheless, he repeatedly commits himself to the thought that on account of the fact that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each the divine essence, although it is possible to *distinguish* between the works of each it is impossible to *divide* them—and even that, in respect of essence, it is impossible to distinguish them. 'The whole entire essence must therefore be common to the Father and the Son; and if so, in respect of essence there is no distinction between them.'¹⁰⁶ The idea that, in the plan of salvation, the will of God the Father may be out of accord with the will of God the Son incarnate, or that the incarnate Son is a mere executive of the Father's good pleasure, cannot be taken seriously as a way of characterizing Calvin's view of the economy.

¹⁰⁴ 'Christ and the Decree: An Unsettled Question for the Reformed Churches Today,' in Lynn Quigley (ed.), *Reformed Theology in Contemporary Perspective* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2006), 134.

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in Ayres, *Nicaea*, 369.

¹⁰⁶ *Inst.* I.13.23.

Providence and Predestination

THE structure of this chapter is a little more complex than that of the others. In the first part I will try to lay to rest an issue that has dogged one kind of Calvin scholarship for some time. This is the vexed question of the relationship between Calvin's treatment of predestination and providence in the *Institutes*—of why, in particular, in the 1559 edition of the *Institutes*, he was moved to change the position of his treatment of providence from book III (where it was a part of his treatment of predestination) to book I. Why, in other words, he separated these two *loci* in the way that he did, and when he did. I offer a reason for this, and go into some detail over it. I argue that his reason is not deeply theological but pedagogical and strategic, and I will first offer *external* evidence for this claim.

Tackling this problem in what I hope is a plausible way clears the ground for a substantive discussion of the theological relationship between the two doctrines, as Calvin saw this, as against their structural relationship, which is a red herring as far as their theological significance is concerned. I will then, by reference to the *internal* evidence present in the 1559 *Institutes*, argue that the two doctrines are complementary, and that the connecting thread is this idea: that Calvin sees the Church of Jesus Christ as having a central position, though not a sole interest, in the outworkings of divine providence. Further, that the way in which a prudent person ought to act, in respect of preserving his life, say, is parallel to the way in which such a person ought to act with respect to his election and predestination. *Pace* Karl Barth, Calvin has a clear doctrine of 'general providence', which is not an accident, nor a failure to work through a Christological principle with full consistency. Central to it, but not exhaustive of it, are God's Fatherly concerns for his Church.

Establishing this fact enables us not only to be clearer on the structural connection between providence and predestination in the *Institutes* and in Calvin's theology more generally, but also to link up his outlook with that of Thomas Aquinas, who has often been rather disparagingly compared with Calvin at this point. I will argue that they share a common outlook on the nature of providence and predestination and the relation between

the two. Predestination was most certainly not an invention of the Reformers.

Finally, we will look beyond Calvin, at the treatment of divine providence in the period of Puritanism, considering the Westminster Divine John Arrowsmith's *Chain of Principles*, published exactly a hundred years after the 1559 *Institutes*.

PROVIDENCE AND PREDESTINATION IN THE STRUCTURE
OF THE *INSTITUTES*

Suggestions as to why Calvin separated his treatments of providence and predestination in the definitive 1559 edition of the *Institutes* are legion. For example, Edward Dowey holds that predestination and soteriology are invariably linked ('The context [of predestination], without exception, both formally and theologically, is Calvin's soteriology, and in 1559 the doctrine comes at the end (but for the doctrine of the resurrection) of the *ordo salutis*'¹). Basil Hall claims that Calvin innovated by separating predestination from the scholastic method of treating it under the doctrines of God and providence.² Karl Barth makes a similar claim.³

Another view, that of M. Charles Bell,⁴ implies that predestination appears in book III because Calvin does not 'begin his theology with a statement of the order of God's decrees and then proceed in logical exposition'. In this he follows the views of James B. Torrance, as provided in his paper 'Strengths and Weaknesses of the Westminster Theology':⁵

Thus the doctrine of the decrees of God in the tradition of Theodore Beza and William Perkins becomes the major premiss of the whole scheme of creation and redemption. This is clearly a move away . . . from Calvin who expounds election at the end of Book Three of the *Institute* as a corollary to grace, after he has expounded all he has to say about the work of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and after his exposition of Incarnation and Atonement.⁶

Not only does this suggest that in Calvin's view providence has nothing to do with grace, but such a view is in any case a non sequitur as far as

¹ *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*, 3rd edn. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 211–12.

² 'Calvin Against the Calvinists', in Gervase E. Duffield (ed.), *John Calvin: A Collection of Distinguished Essays* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1966), 27.

³ *Church Dogmatics*, IV.II.2, 85.

⁴ *Calvin and Scottish Theology* (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1985), 26.

⁵ Torrance, 'Strengths and Weaknesses of the Westminster Theology', in Alasdair I. C. Heron (ed.), *The Westminster Confession in the Church Today* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew, 1982), 46.

⁶ Torrance, 46.

doctrines functioning axiomatically are concerned. For denying that predestination is a theological axiom leaves untouched the hypothesis that in moving the treatment of providence to book I Calvin might be intending *it* to function axiomatically.

It would be rash to suppose that all these claims about the significance of where the treatments of providence and predestination are to be found are consistent, for they are manifestly not. And even if any one of them were true, pointing this out does not help us to understand why Calvin did what he did. Simply to say that for Calvin predestination is not a part of providence, besides being false, tells us nothing positive about their respective importance for him. *That* Calvin treated predestination and providence as he did does not reveal to us *why* he did so.

It needs to be borne in mind that Calvin's treatment of providence in the 1559 *Institutes* is not a piece of natural theology, nor even an abstract treatment of a Christian theological *locus*, but an exposition of providence by a Christian for Christians. From first to last Calvin asserts that its reach, and its character, can only be known through faithful attention to God's revelation, and can only be truly understood by those who taste that special care 'in which alone the paternal favour of God is discerned.'⁷

Another thing that most of these views do not take notice of is that when Calvin separated providence from predestination he did so not by moving predestination from book I, in order to emphasize its soteriological connections, but by moving providence from book III to book I, leaving predestination where it was. It is not as if Calvin, anticipating with a sense of foreboding the rise of 'decretal theology', moved predestination away from any position that could remotely be regarded as 'axiomatic.'

So not only are these various suggestions as to why providence and predestination were separated by Calvin at odds with each other, there is no hard evidence that any of them reflect Calvin's own view, and some of them at least seem to be driven by the various commentators' own theological agendas, showing little acquaintance with the literary history of the *Institutes*, and even an ignorance of the tone and character of Calvin's treatment of providence in book I. The question therefore presses: If Calvin thought that predestination was an aspect of divine providence, as he did, why did he separate the two discussions in the way that he did in the 1559 *Institutes*, the definitive edition?

⁷ *Inst.* I.16.1.

My claim is that the movement of the material into two separate *loci*, finally achieved in the 1559 *Institutes*, is due, to a significant degree (for other influences cannot be ruled out⁸), to the culmination of a process of clarification in Calvin's own mind over what he called the 'two issues.' He learned by bitter experience the importance of clearly distinguishing them, and of the need to avoid possible confusion of them.

It is well known that Calvin recognized the power of voluntary human choice but refused to dignify this power by calling it 'free will.' He reserved that term for the power to choose the good, which he (in common with Augustine of Hippo) claimed had been lost through the Fall and was only restored (in the elect) by the renewal or redirection of the *voluntas*. The importance of clearly making this distinction was borne in upon Calvin, I suggest, during his controversy with Pighius over the bondage of the will, and confirmed by his further reflections on providence in the years after.⁹ Pighius's work, *Ten Books on Human Free Choice and Divine Grace* (1542), has the merit of distinguishing in its very structure between the two issues of human choice and sin (treated in the first six books), and human choice and divine providence (covered in the last four). On reading Pighius Calvin at once concentrated his attention on the first six books, writing *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will* in 1543 (reserving his treatment of the last four books for later). The trouble was that, in Calvin's view, Pighius's actual treatment of these issues did not correspond to the structure of his book. In at least two places in *Bondage* he is sensitive to the danger of confusing the two issues. First:

He has undertaken to deal with the providence of God, on which this necessity depends, elsewhere, and this is just what he does in the last four books of his work. Why then does he now mix up this issue with the other one? Let him say whatever he has to say, even if it is weak, even if it is worthless, if only he will stay in one place, I will let him say it. But now that he has brought forward two issues for debate, and undertaken that he will speak about each one separately, why does he not fulfil in his actual discourse the promise which he made before?¹⁰

⁸ An example is the idea, mentioned by Karl Barth, that Calvin placed (or better, that he kept) predestination in book III in order to 'make the doctrine of election in some degree the consummation of that of reconciliation, introducing it not in the middle or at the beginning, but as the ultimate and decisive word which sheds additional light upon all that has gone before' (*CD* II.2.85).

⁹ Besides the influence of this controversy Calvin may have been less than impressed by the way in which Martin Luther, in his *Bondage of the Will* (1525), had presented a cumulative case for the bondage of the will to sin, failing clearly to separate human choice and human freedom. For further discussion see Paul Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 169–70.

¹⁰ John Calvin, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will* (1543), ed. A. N. S. Lane, trans. G. I. Davies (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1996), 35.

And later on: ‘As for the necessary or chance occurrence of events, I prefer not to touch on this at the present time, lest by entwining different topics I confuse the order of my discourse.’¹¹ As he tells us earlier on in *Bondage*,¹² the potential confusion (which in Calvin’s view Pighius maliciously exploits¹³) arises over two kinds of necessity: the necessity with which what God wills happens, and the fact that men and women in bondage to sin perform sinful actions necessarily—sinful actions being the outcome of the sinful *habitus* of the soul, an accidental property of the soul the existence of which is due to the Fall. Calvin distinguishes the two senses of ‘necessary’, adding that his treatment of the first sense ‘is one that I am touching on lightly with, as it were, only a brief mention, since elsewhere it will have to be treated at greater length and with more attention’,¹⁴ which is what happens in his later writings on predestination and providence.¹⁵ This may be Calvin’s earliest published, avowed recognition of the fact that there are two separate issues here.

Because there are two issues regarding human freedom and necessity, one pertaining to the nature of human choice as such (an issue properly to be discussed as part of God’s providential rule over his animate and inanimate creation, where Calvin distinguishes divine providence from pagan notions of chance and fate) and the other to human choice as bound in sin and freed by grace (issues to be discussed as part of soteriology), I suggest that Calvin came to think that it was wiser to physically separate his treatments of them. So eventually (in a development of thought so gradual that it did not affect the arrangement either of the third (1543) or the fourth (1550) editions of the *Institutes*), he divided the one place in the 1539 *Institutes*, the edition current during the controversy with Pighius, where the ‘two issues’ are discussed together, chapter 8, ‘The Predestination and Providence of God.’ So in the definitive edition of the *Institutes*, in 1559, he places the first under the doctrine of God (book I of the 1559 *Institutes*), while the second remains as part of soteriology (book III).

However, this is not to say that this is the only *locus* of the *Institutes* where the ‘two issues’ are discussed. Naturally enough, Calvin’s treatment of the bondage of the will to sin forms part of his anthropology,¹⁶ and in his treatment of providence he explicitly reserves some treatment of that topic for his discussion of man in sin. ‘But as in the Second Book (4. 3, 4),

¹¹ *Bondage*, 172.

¹² *Bondage*, 37 8.

¹³ *Bondage*, 35 6.

¹⁴ *Bondage*, 37 8.

¹⁵ Notably in *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (1552).

¹⁶ *Inst.* II.2.1 5, principally.

in discussing the question of man's freedom, this subject will again be considered, the little that has now been said seems to be all that the occasion requires.¹⁷

Arising from Calvin's irritation over Pighius's spoiling tactics, the need for making this physical separation was further underlined in Calvin's mind, I suggest, by three other events. The first is his writing of *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (published in 1552), a work directed against Pighius's last four books, and also against Georgius, which although chiefly about predestination concludes with a treatment of providence in general. The second, five years later, is his *Brief Reply in Refutation of the Calumnies of a Certain Worthless Person*, a work directed against Sebastian Castellio, which is largely concerned with the voluntariness of human action and the fact that God is not implicated in human evil, even though such evil actions proceed from his will. Finally, in 1558 Calvin wrote *A Defence of the Secret Providence of God*, again directed against the views of Sebastian Castellio, and on similar themes.¹⁸

It is interesting to note, however, that in the very first edition of the *Institutes* the treatments of providence and predestination, though very brief, are also separate. But this arrangement is simply an outcome of the fact that in that work Calvin was following the order of the Apostles' Creed, providence occurring under the first part, election and predestination under the fourth part.¹⁹ According to Richard Muller, in the case of the second edition of the *Institutes* (1539) the catechetical framework is subsumed within the Pauline law–gospel order, and Calvin begins to think of his work as a treatment of dogmatic *loci*, a change also evident in the 1537–8 catechisms.²⁰ So there comes to be a locus *De praedestinatione et providentia Dei*. In 1550 the locus *De cognitione hominis* of 1539 becomes *De cognitione hominis et libero arbitrio*, while the locus *De praedestinatione*

¹⁷ *Inst.* I.18.2.

¹⁸ There is occasional confusion over these two works. For example, W. de Greef, in *The Writings of John Calvin: An Introductory Guide* (trans. Lyle D. Bierma (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1993), 178 n. 27) wrongly identifies the latter as that translated by J. K. S. Reid as 'A Brief Reply' (in *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, trans. and ed. Reid (London: SCM, 1954)). It was in fact translated by Henry Cole and forms part (with his translation of *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*) of *Calvin's Calvinism* (London: Sovereign Grace Union, 1927). In a rather high handed way Cole took the last part of Calvin's *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* and made it into the opening section of *Secret Providence*. No one seems to have noticed the fact, probably because Cole himself did not mention it.

¹⁹ *Institution of the Christian Religion*, trans. F. L. Battles (Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox, 1975), providence: 66; election: 78–9. Each of these expositions is very brief, and there is little discussion of the human will.

²⁰ *The Unaccommodated Calvin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 104–5, 119–20.

et providentiae remains. But—I hypothesize—the joining of providence with predestination in 1539, though unchanged in the 1543 and 1550 editions, gradually came in Calvin's judgement to be an organizational defect of the work, for it could lead to the confusion of the 'two issues', whether unintentional or the result of deliberate obfuscation, as happened, Calvin thought, with Pighius. So this joining of the two is definitively reversed in the 1559 edition. Muller says of this:

With specific regard to the placement of the doctrine of predestination in the 1559 edition, we can now safely conclude not only that it remains determined by the Pauline *ordo* of the 1539 *Institutes* but also that the twentieth-century discussion of Calvin's definitive movement of the doctrine 'out of the doctrine of God' in order to argue one doctrinal implication rather than another is an utterly anachronistic argument that remains ignorant of the underlying motives for the arrangement of the *Institutes*. Indeed, as the *Synopsis Editionum Institutionis Calvinianae* offered by the editors of the *Calvini Opera* indicates so graphically, it is the chapters on faith and creed, the similarity and difference of the Old and the New Testaments, human traditions, providence, and prayer, that were moved, while at the same time the location of predestination remained stable. What Calvin did with his discussion of predestination and providence was, in fact, to move the section on providence into his discussion of God, conflating the relevant sections of the 1550 chapter on predestination and providence with the comments on providence already in place in his 1550 chapter on the 'first part of the creed', thereby excising a duplication of materials.²¹

As we noted earlier, there was in fact no 'movement', in any edition of the *Institutes*, of predestination from an early position in the *Institutes* where it could have served as the axiom of 'decretal theology.' The movement was in fact the other way, providence being detached from predestination, which was already located well into the body of the work. According to Muller, the movement of material on providence away from predestination to the doctrine of God (to join other such material already there), accomplished in the 1559 edition, was simply a tidying-up exercise to make the contours of the 1559 edition match those of Paul's Letter to the Romans. But I'm suggesting that there's more to this than merely good housekeeping. If one were to combine what Muller says with the present suggestion, then the chronology would look like this:

1536 First edition of the *Institutes*. Providence and predestination treated separately.

²¹ *Unaccommodated Calvin*, 135–6. See also Richard Muller, *After Calvin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 98.

1539 Second edition of the *Institutes* (over twice as long as the first edition). It contains a chapter on ‘The Knowledge of Humanity’ (ch. 2) and one on ‘The Predestination and Providence of God’ (ch. 8).²² Here for the first time providence and predestination are treated together, an arrangement that lasted until the 1559 edition.

1542 Albertus Pighius, *Ten Books on Human Free Choice and Divine Grace*—a critique of Calvin’s views of human choice in the second edition of the *Institutes*, specifically of the two chapters mentioned above.

1543 Calvin, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*. The response to one half of Pighius’s critique. In this response Calvin clearly separates the ‘two issues.’

1543 Third edition of the *Institutes* (repr. 1545). Tony Lane claims that the 1543 edition of the *Institutes* ‘was already largely complete by early 1542 and may even have been with the printer by the time Calvin was replying to Pighius’,²³ so any influence of the Pighius controversy on that edition is not to be expected.

1550 Fourth edition of the *Institutes*. According to Tony Lane, ‘[t]he 1550 revision was minor, and the new material did not affect the present topic. It is in the definitive 1559 edition that any influence of the debate with Pighius is to be sought.’²⁴ This is so, but there is some structural rearrangement in the 1550 edition, as Muller shows,²⁵ calling it a ‘significantly altered work.’ But providence and predestination remain together, as chapter 14.²⁶

1552 Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*. This is Calvin’s response (*inter alia*) to the second half of Pighius’s (d. 1542) critique. Calvin’s treatment of providence and predestination remain together.

1557 Calvin, *Brief Reply in Refutation of the Calumnies of a Certain Worthless Person*.

1558 Calvin, *A Defence of the Secret Providence of God*.

1559 Final edition of the *Institutes*. Providence is moved from predestination into the doctrine of God (book I). In his editorial introduction to the English translation of *Bondage* Lane notes certain ways in which the controversy with Pighius affects the content of Calvin’s discussion of the bondage and liberation of the will, though understandably says nothing about the possible influence of that controversy on the structure of the *Institutes*.

So my claim is, that prompted by the debate with Pighius on free will and on the bondage of the will to sin and by his own later writings on providence after Pighius’s death, Calvin gradually persuaded himself to

²² Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin*, 121.

²³ *Bondage*, xvi.

²⁴ *Bondage*, xv xvi. There is a fuller discussion of this matter in Anthony N. S. Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1999), 185–9.

²⁵ *Unaccommodated Calvin*, 132.

²⁶ *Unaccommodated Calvin*, 131.

physically separate the discussion of providence and predestination in the *Institutes* in order more clearly to demarcate the ‘two issues’ and so to avoid unnecessary confusion.²⁷ He did this by definitively locating providence in book I. In the 1559 *Institutes* Calvin in effect returns his treatment of the ‘two issues’ (at least in so far as these are treated in the topics of predestination and providence) to their respective places in the first edition of the *Institutes*, though with a very different theological rationale. He did not come to a decision regarding this separation immediately upon writing *Bondage*, but perhaps solidified his view on the need for it after further reflection involved in preparing his work on predestination (1552) and his two works on providence of 1557 and 1558. It needs to be remembered that although Calvin worked tirelessly at his books, he was not in the habit of rushing into print. Almost ten years separate *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will* (1543), his reply to the first part of Pighius’s *Ten Books on Human Free Choice and Divine Grace* (1542), and *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (1552), his reply to the second part.

This hypothesis is consistent with what Richard Muller says in *The Unaccommodated Calvin* about the structural rationale of the *Institutes* through its several editions, and with what Lane says in his introduction to the English translation of *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will* about the influence of the controversy with Pighius on the 1559 *Institutes*.²⁸ But it has the advantage of integrating this element of the editorial history of the *Institutes* with such evidence as we possess of Calvin’s own theological development.

PROVIDENCE AND PREDESTINATION: THOMAS AQUINAS

With the issue of how Calvin organizes the relation of predestination to providence in mind, we will briefly consider two places where Thomas Aquinas discusses predestination: *Summa Theologiae* I.23, and article 6 of his *De Veritate*.²⁹ In both these places providence and predestination

²⁷ Though why, if this hypothesis is correct, he took so long to make this change is not clear.

²⁸ For the argument that the ordering of the 1559 *Institutes* in respect of providence and predestination follows the structure of Paul’s Letter to the Romans see Gary Neal Hensen, ‘Door and Passageway: Calvin’s Use of Romans as Hermeneutical and Theological Guide’, in K. Ehrensperger and R. Ward Holder (eds.), *Reformation Readings of Romans* (New York: Clark, 2008). I owe this reference to Stephen Williams.

²⁹ Translated by Robert Mulligan in *Thomas Aquinas: Providence and Predestination* (Chicago, Ill.: Regnery, 1953). All page references are to this edition.

are treated alongside each other, as part of the doctrine of God, especially of the divine will as this is an expression of God's love, justice, and mercy (questions 19–24). This simply reflects a different organizing principle than that which Calvin adopted in the 1559 *Institutes*. Whereas for Aquinas much about providence and predestination was organized under the doctrine of God, with reference to the various powers of the divine mind, Calvin focuses throughout the *Institutes* on what God does rather than what God is, and organizes the 1559 *Institutes* by establishing a fairly strict separation between the work of God in creation and the work of God in redemption. But this difference in method ought not to distract us from recognizing a common doctrinal outlook.

The treatments of the themes of providence and predestination by the two theologians are very similar. Thomas's thought is governed by two ideas. The first is that predestination is an eternal act, and the second is that it has precisely those temporal effects that are intended by God, who plans³⁰ and 'sends' predestination, in rather the way in which an archer sends an arrow. In both these respects predestination is an aspect of providence:³¹

Clearly predestination is like the plan, existing in God's mind, for the ordering of some persons to salvation. The carrying out of this is passively as it were in the persons predestined, though actively in God. When considered executively in this way, predestination is spoken of as a 'calling' and a 'glorifying', thus St. Paul says, *Whom he predestinated, them also he called and glorified*.³²

Election and predestination are interrelated. The following extract summarizes the overall position:

By its very meaning predestination presupposes election, and election chosen loving. The reason for this is that predestination, as we have said, is part of providence, which is like prudence, as we have noticed, and is the plan existing in the mind of the one who rules things for a purpose. Things are so ordained only in virtue of a preceding intention for that end. The predestination of some to salvation means that God wills their salvation. This is where special and chosen loving come in. Special, because God wills this blessing of eternal salvation to some, for, as we have seen, loving is willing a person good, chosen

³⁰ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia 23.2, in *Volume 2: The Mind and Power of God: Part One: Questions 14–26* (Garden City, N.Y.: Image, 1969).

³¹ Muller, *Thomas Aquinas*, 101.

³² *Summa Theologiae*, Ia 23.2.

loving because he wills this to some and not to others, for, as we have seen, some he rejects.³³

Thomas also provides a full and clear account of reprobation:

The causality of reprobation differs from that of predestination. Predestination is the cause both of what the predestinated expect in the future life, namely glory, and of what they receive in the present, namely grace. Reprobation does not cause what there is in the present, namely moral fault, though that is why we are left without God. And it is the cause why we shall meet our deserts in the future, namely eternal punishment. The fault starts from the free decision of the one who abandons grace and is rejected, so bringing the prophecy to pass, *Your loss is from yourself, O Israel* [Hosea: 13,9].³⁴

Even if predestination were granted in accordance with the foreseen merit in the ones predestined,³⁵ such merits are themselves the product of divine predestinating grace. So predestination is not on account of any foreseen merits, but they are the cause of it only in the sense that they are part of the ordained divine sequence which begins in the calling of men and women and ends in their glorification:

The fact that God wishes to give grace and glory is due simply to His generosity. The reason for His willing these things that arise simply from His generosity is the overflowing love of His will for His end-object, in which the perfection of His goodness is found. The cause of predestination, therefore, is nothing other than God's goodness.³⁶

So, what about the place of free will?

³³ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia 23.4, 168. Note the comments of Fergus Kerr: 'For Thomas, God is the cause that enables all agents to cause what they do...There is no problem. He cites Isaiah 26: 12 ["O Lord...you have done for us all our works"]...together with John 15: 5: "Without me, you can do nothing"; and Philippians 2: 13: "It is God who worketh in us to will and to accomplish according to his good will". For Thomas, evidently, Scripture settles it; there is no need for theoretical explanations of how divine freedom and human freedom do not, or need not be thought to, encroach on each other... Thomas only excludes certain tempting views: yes, God does everything, God is not a partner in the existence and activities of the world; God does everything, however, in such a way that the autonomy and reality of created agents is respected. Above all: the effect is not attributed to a human agent and to divine agency in such a way that it is partly done by God and partly by the human agent; rather, it is done wholly by both, according to a different way, just as the same effect is wholly attributed to the instrument and also wholly to the principal agent - but now Thomas is referring us to an analogy, and either we see it or we don't. In the end, he excludes certain views and leaves us simply with the mystery of the relationship between divine creativity and human autonomy...Thomas has nothing more basic to offer than these observations' (*After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 44-6). I'm grateful to Mark Talbot for drawing attention to this discussion.

³⁴ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia 23.3.

³⁵ Mulligan 144.

³⁶ Mulligan 116.

But God does not act on the will in the manner of one necessitating; for He does not force the will but merely moves it, without taking away its own proper mode, which consists in being free with respect to opposites. Consequently, even though nothing can resist the divine will, our will, like everything else, carries out the divine will according to its own proper mode. Indeed, the divine will has given things their mode of being in order that His will be fulfilled. Therefore, some things fulfill the divine will necessarily, other things, contingently; but that which God wills always takes place.³⁷

PROVIDENCE AND PREDESTINATION IN CALVIN

We noted earlier some of the structural changes in successive editions of the *Institutes*, particularly those that affected the respective positions of Calvin's treatment of providence and predestination. I suggested that they were separated for pedagogic reasons, and not because there is doctrinal separation between the two topics, or because they are treated by a different theological method. This is borne out by noting the ways in which, even in his treatment of providence in book I, the themes of providence and predestination are interwoven. Although separated to avoid confusion over free will, the two doctrines are nevertheless closely interrelated in Calvin's thought.

Despite allegedly departing from the scholastic habit of treating predestination as *pars providentiae*, Calvin's view coincides with the sentiment of Thomas Aquinas that 'God makes higher provision for the just than for the unjust, inasmuch as he does not let anything happen that would finally prevent their salvation.'³⁸ To Calvin's mind as to Thomas's, predestination is but a special aspect of divine providence as a whole. Calvin sometimes refers to divine providence as 'providence in general',³⁹ for he writes that the design of God in teaching that all things are divinely ordained 'is to show that he takes care of the whole human race, but is especially vigilant in governing the church, which he favours with a closer inspection.'⁴⁰ Through his providence God takes care of his saints. It is interesting, however, that Calvin stops short of supralapsarianism: he does not argue that 'providence in general' is *solely for the benefit* of the Church, or entirely subordinated to her interests, but that general providence and the Lord's special care for the Church are interconnected though not merged.

³⁷ Mulligan 130 1.

³⁸ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia 22.2.

³⁹ e.g. in the French version of *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, as noted by J. K. S. Reid (*Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, 162 n. 1).

⁴⁰ *Inst.* I.17.1.

Consistently with this, as we will see, in the 1559 *Institutes* Calvin takes many of his examples of God's providence from the history of redemption in Scripture, and draws lessons from providence for the godly. This is not surprising, for the metaphysical structures of God's providential ordering and of the predestining of his saints are very similar, if not identical.

Divine providence is particular, not a general divine superintendence but one that reaches down to the minutest detail. It is the all-embracing control of all aspects of the creation, God's personal governing of his world, not to be confused with an impersonal fate.⁴¹ Calvin proceeds to show that 'the thing to be proved, therefore, is, that single events are so regulated by God, and all events so proceed from his determinate counsel, that nothing happens fortuitously.'⁴² He does so by considering, in order, God's providential rule over nature, over human actions, and over chance events. Let us glance at each of these in turn.

In the case of God's government of nature, Calvin emphasizes that this is not partial or half-hearted, as if God sets up the natural order but its seasonal and other variations are left outside his control. Not only does the sun shine by the will of God, but when it burns, or when it is hidden, these particular events are also from his hand. 'Surely, if the flight of birds is regulated by the counsel of God, we must acknowledge with the prophet, that while he "dwelleth on high", he "humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth" (Ps. 113, 5-6).'⁴³ And miraculous events involving nature, such as the stirring of the wind that enabled the Children of Israel to cross the Red Sea, are equally from God's hand. Modern science stresses regularity and repeatability in nature, and so do accounts of providence influenced by deism. In view of this it is interesting to note that in order to emphasize the detail of God's providential action Calvin stresses the distinctiveness of individual natural occurrences. 'It is true, indeed, that each species of created objects is moved by a secret instinct of nature, as if they obeyed the eternal command of God, and spontaneously followed the course which God at first appointed.'⁴⁴ But he insists that even the particular events of nature, and not simply natural laws, are regulated by God, and does so by drawing attention to the variety of natural occurrences. This variety is not due to the influence of the stars, for

⁴¹ *Inst.* I.16.8.

⁴² *Inst.* I.16.4.

⁴³ *Inst.* I.16.5.

⁴⁴ *Inst.* I.16.4.

[i]n the Law and the Prophets he repeatedly declares, that as often as he waters the earth with dew and rain, he manifests his favour, that by his command the heaven becomes hard as iron, the crops are destroyed by mildew and other evils, that storms and hail, in devastating the field, are signs of sure and special vengeance. This being admitted, it is certain that not a drop of rain falls without the express command of God.⁴⁵

It is not necessary to interpret Calvin as denying natural causes on those occasions when God sends mildew, and so to affirm that he acts in ‘gaps’ in the natural order. For he could hold to both, to two complementary descriptions of the same event. This would only be a case of overdetermination if it were true that were God not to send mildew then mildew would still occur. But since both God’s sending of mildew and mildew occurring on some occasion are (for Calvin) outworkings of one indivisible divine decree, this counterfactual would be false. The point is that his interest is in the one unique providential order unfolded by the will of God, not in those parts of that order that are observed to have a uniform, repeating character or that can be made to recur in a laboratory.

What is true of nature is also true of human affairs. Quoting Proverbs 20: 24 and 16: 33 Calvin says: ‘It is a strange infatuation, surely for miserable men, who cannot even give utterance except in so far as God pleases, to begin to act without him!’ Even further, Calvin emphasizes that events which are seemingly chancy and fortuitous are subject to the Lord. ‘Who does not attribute the lot to the blindness of fortune? Not so the Lord, who claims the decision for himself.’⁴⁶ Some events may seem to us to be fortuitous, without apparent rhyme or reason:

But as the order, method, end, and necessity of events, are, for the most part, hidden in the counsel of God, though it is certain that they are produced by the will of God, they have the appearance of being fortuitous, such being the form under which they present themselves to us, whether considered in their own nature, or estimated according to our knowledge and judgment.⁴⁷

Compare this with what he says about the nature of predestination. It is that ‘by which God adopts some to the hope of life, and adjudges others to eternal death.’⁴⁸ God is the author of predestination and, since God is eternal, predestination is

the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and,

⁴⁵ *Inst.* I.16.5.

⁴⁶ *Inst.* I.16.6.

⁴⁷ *Inst.* I.16.9.

⁴⁸ *Inst.* III.21.5.

accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death.⁴⁹

So each person is born already destined to life, or to death, and every event of a person's life is decreed by God.

So predestination, God's particular purpose for his Church, is an aspect of divine providence. However, for Calvin the scope of predestination covers both predestination to grace and glory and also reprobation. This is sometimes called 'double predestination' though it is not clear that Calvin ever used this expression, and certainly he did not hold that reprobation was simply a logical consequence of the fact of predestination, since it was open to God to have elected the entire race. And while the bypassing of some is due to God's will, the ground of their condemnation lies not in that will but in the fact of their sinning.

The expressions 'election' and 'predestination to eternal life' often seem to be used more or less interchangeably. For example, in *Institutes* III.21.7 Calvin uses 'election' and 'predestination', first, as regards the nation of Israel, reminding us that Calvin thinks that Scripture distinguishes between divine election of Israel the nation and the eternal election of the true seed of Abraham, the chosen remnant within Israel, which the New Testament Church is in the line of—that is, individual men and women destined not merely for temporary privileges but for eternal salvation:

Although it is now sufficiently plain that God by his secret counsel chooses whom he will while he rejects others, his gratuitous election has only been partially explained until we come to the case of single individuals, to whom God not only offers salvation, but so assigns it, that the certainty of the result remains not dubious or suspended. These are considered as belonging to that one seed of which Paul makes mention (Rom.9.8; Gal 3.16 etc.). For although adoption was deposited in the hand of Abraham, yet as many of his posterity were cut off as rotten members, in order that election may stand and be effectual, it is necessary to ascend to the head in whom the heavenly Father has connected his elect with each other, and bound them to himself by an indissoluble tie.⁵⁰

Second, as providence is not a mere deistic 'upholding' of the creation once it is in place, but is a teleological, means–end ordering of all that happens, so predestination is a means–end ordering of the events of the lives of the elect for their ultimate benefit. It is because of these similarities that the Christian can put the fact of divine providence to use, as Calvin shows in I.17. In a parallel fashion, in writing of Christ as the 'mirror' of

⁴⁹ *Inst.* III.21.5.

⁵⁰ *Inst.* III.21.7.

election⁵¹ Calvin takes the question of establishing whether or not a person is elect to be a case of relating means to ends.

If Christ is proclaimed and we learn about him, this is providential. If as part of learning about Christ and the way of salvation we learn that the gift of God's grace in Christ comes to a person as a result of an eternal election, how will we respond? We might be tempted to try to discover whether we are elect or not by directly enquiring of God. If the answer were 'yes', then we could rest content; if 'no' then we would be thrown into utter despair. But is this the way to go? Calvin's answer is this: As a prudent man observes the connection between means and ends, and adopts means appropriate to his ends, so to gain the knowledge of election we must look for evidence of what, in God's purposes, election connects with.

So one interesting piece of evidence that Calvin sees providence and predestination in very similar terms is the position that he assigns to the place of human prudence in each. (We have already noted that for Thomas providence is itself a piece of *divine* prudence.) This is part of the balance that he attempts to hold between regard for God as the primary cause of all that happens, and the secondary causes of these events. So in his treatment of providence he distinguishes between the attitudes of the prudent and foolish person towards the same kind of event. When evil threatens, a provident person takes avoiding action, while a foolish person is neglectful and too lazy to use the means of preservation that are at hand. In a parallel fashion, Calvin thinks that there is a wise and a foolish way of attempting to obtain the certainty of one's election. The evidence of our election, Calvin says, lies in the knowledge of our communion with Christ. It is imprudent to speculate directly on whether or not we are elected; Christ is the mirror of election. And so in both cases we are to hold a similar attitude, to make a right use of the evidence that God provides for our benefit:⁵²

For though a belief of our election animates us to invoke God, yet when we frame our prayers, it were preposterous to obtrude it upon God, or to stipulate in this way, 'O Lord, if I am elected, hear me.' He would have us rest satisfied with his promises, and not to inquire elsewhere whether or not he is disposed to hear us. We shall thus be disentangled from many snares, if we know how to make a right use of what is rightly written.⁵³

The fact that all things are willed by God is a matter of great comfort for the believer, who recognizes that both prosperity and adversity are from the hand of God, and that the wicked are also in his hand:

⁵¹ *Inst.* III.24.5.

⁵² *Inst.* I.17.4; III.24.5.

⁵³ *Inst.* III.24.5.

The Christian, then, being most fully persuaded, that all things come to pass by the dispensation of God, and that nothing happens fortuitously, will always direct his eye to him as the principal cause of events, at the same time paying due regard to inferior causes in their own place. Next, he will have no doubt that a special providence is awake for his preservation, and will not suffer anything to happen that will not turn to his good and safety.⁵⁴

Note that Calvin here, as elsewhere,⁵⁵ uses the distinction between primary and secondary causes. We will consider Calvin's attitude to means and ends in more detail in Chapter 8.

While the terms predestination and election are sometimes used interchangeably, more exactly predestination in a narrower sense is the 'hand-maid' of election.⁵⁶ It is the destining of those elected to grace and glory. Not only is God the author of predestination, he is the source of it; that is, Calvin is emphatic that who are predestined does not depend upon anything in them that God foreknows and that makes them deserve his mercy. As he puts it, commenting on Romans 8: 29, the foreknowledge of God 'is not a bare prescience . . . but the adoption by which he had always distinguished his children from the reprobate.' And again, in his comment on Romans 11: 2, Calvin says 'by the verb *foreknow* is not to be understood a foresight, I know not of what, by which God foresees what sort of being any one will be, but that good pleasure, according to which he has chosen those as sons to himself, who, being not ye born, could not have procured for themselves his favour.' These are the remnant, chosen by grace (v. 5).⁵⁷ Here, for Calvin, such foreknowledge is not simply causal, but also graciously causal.

The entire divine plan of salvation was founded on 'his free mercy, without any respect to human worth.' God does not predestine a person to salvation because he foreknows that person's meritorious works, or his faith, or anything else that is 'worthy' about that person that might provide a reason why God would discriminate in his favour. Such discrimination is indeed grounded in God's judgement, although that judgement is 'incomprehensible'⁵⁸—not in the sense that it is incoherent, but in

⁵⁴ *Inst.* I.17.6.

⁵⁵ For example: 'What I have maintained about the diversity of causes must not be forgotten: the proximate cause is one thing, the remote cause another. Then we shall know how great is the distinction between the equitable providence of God and the stormy assaults of men' (*Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, trans. Reid, 181).

⁵⁶ *Inst.* III.22.

⁵⁷ *Comm.* Rom. 8: 29; see also 11: 2.

⁵⁸ *Inst.* III.21.7.

the sense that it is unfathomable, and perhaps necessarily unfathomable, by us. But in any case his judgement is not based upon merit, for the objects of his love have no intrinsic merit. The sense of mystery, vividly present in Augustine (and of course in the Apostle Paul), but muted in Aquinas, for example, returns in Calvin. So predestination is 'secret', and thus a person cannot know whether or not he is predestined to life by a priori reasoning, or by directly divining God's will, but only a posteriori, through his relationship to Christ.⁵⁹

This is God's unchangeable plan: in willing the end, the salvation of the Church, he also wills the means, which are 'alone effectual for their salvation.'⁶⁰ Those on whom God has eternally planned to show such mercy are, in time, called and justified through the means of grace. Calvin emphasizes that the 'golden chain' of Romans 8 is unbreakable. 'In regard to the elect, we regard calling as the evidence of election, and justification as another symbol of its manifestation, until it is fully accomplished by the attainment of glory.'⁶¹ God plans and purposes the outworking of his election in the predestinating of those elected to grace and glory in the same way that he plans and purpose everything that comes to pass.

Most dramatically of all, it is part of the pattern of providence that God is in control of the evils that occur, and is able to bring good out of evil. For Calvin both providence and predestination are works of God's goodness. It is not as if providence is morally neutral or merely mechanical, while the election of the Church, and her predestination to glory, is the only effect of God's goodness. In thinking about providence it is a mistake to separate God's justice from his power. It is that 'universal, overruling providence from which nothing flows that is not right, though the reasons thereof may be concealed.'⁶²

The last chapter of his treatment of providence in book I of the *Institutes*, 'The instrumentality of the wicked employed by God, while he continues free from every taint', is devoted to this theme. This has a ready application to predestination; indeed, many of the scriptural examples that Calvin uses in this chapter concerning God's control of evil, and consequently his ability to bring good out of evil, have to do with redemption, with the unfolding of God's election in the redemption of the elect. He takes examples from Job. 'God was the author of that trial of which Satan and wicked robbers were merely the instruments.'⁶³ And while it is in general true that the hearts of kings are in the hand of God

⁵⁹ *Inst.* III.24.5.

⁶⁰ *Inst.* III.21.7.

⁶¹ *Inst.* III.21.7.

⁶² *Inst.* I.17.2.

⁶³ *Inst.* I.18.1.

who deploys them as he will,⁶⁴ a chief instance of this has to do with the crucifixion of Christ:

The Jews purposed to destroy Christ. Pilate and the soldiers indulged them in their fury; yet the disciples confess in solemn prayer that all the wicked did nothing but what the hand and counsel of God had decreed (Acts 4.28), just as Peter had previously said in his discourse, that Christ was delivered to death by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2.23); in other words, that God, to whom all things are known from the beginning, had determined what the Jews had executed.⁶⁵

It is because of the intertwining of providence and predestination, each of which has its source in God's goodness, that the knowledge of God's providence is of benefit to the believer. The fact of God's providential care delivers him from extreme fear and anxiety. 'This, I say, is his comfort, that his heavenly Father so embraces all things under his power—so governs them at will by his nod—so regulates them by his wisdom, that nothing takes place save according to his appointment.'⁶⁶

CALVIN AND THOMAS

The intellectual relation between Calvin and Aquinas is a puzzling one. To begin with, it can be shown that time and again Calvin's and Thomas's views coincide—on the distinction between God as he is in himself and as he is revealed to us, for example; on natural law and common grace, as we will see in Chapter 10; and also here, on providence and predestination. Why was this? One must not be misled by the nearly 150 references to Thomas listed in the Author and Source Index of the Battles translation of the 1559 *Institutes*. The vast majority of these are references to Thomas introduced into the editor's footnotes. There are only two explicit references to Thomas in the 1559 *Institutes*, at II.2.4 and III.22.9, and scarcely any elsewhere.

However, since Calvin does refer to him occasionally, it can't be argued that he knew nothing of him. Maybe he thought that it would be obvious where his indebtedness lies, needing no citation, or that this relationship would be uncontroversial, needing no defence. In many instances the coincidence between the two theologians' views is in areas not central to the Reformation. When it comes to the central areas of concern—grace, the bondage of the will, predestination—then Calvin invariably defers to Augustine, and to a lesser extent to Bernard, who are

⁶⁴ *Inst.* I.18.2.

⁶⁵ *Inst.* I.18.1.

⁶⁶ *Inst.* I.17.11.

centre stage in his exposition of these themes. Calvin wished not only to root his convictions in Scripture, but also to emphasize that his views were not novelties in the thought of the one acknowledged on all sides to be the great Doctor of the Church, the bishop of Hippo. And it must not be forgotten that Thomas was a theoretician of the doctrine of transubstantiation; Calvin perhaps judged that it would be impolitic to show where he and Thomas were of one mind.

As noted, this sidelining of Thomas (if that is what it is) is certainly not because there was any great dissonance between Calvin's views on predestination, for example, and Thomas's. On the central features of that doctrine—on the relation between predestination and foreknowledge, on reprobation and its grounds, on providence and predestination, on the belief that there are only a few predestined, on the exegesis of Romans 8 and 9, Ephesians 1—Calvin and Aquinas are at one.

One of the two explicit references to Thomas in the *Institutes* concerns predestination. Calvin takes issue with him over a 'subtlety',⁶⁷ just as occasionally he takes issue with Augustine. The fact of such occasional dissent from Thomas may itself suggest that otherwise there are areas of broad agreement, though this argument from silence is by itself not very convincing.

As we saw earlier, there are places where Thomas claimed that there is a sense in which God predestines to glory on account of merits; namely, if these merits are themselves seen as the fruit of divine grace. Calvin calls this a 'subtlety', a 'sophistry', a distraction from the main point, which is that in election we are to see 'his mere goodness.' Election is unilateral and immediate, not routed via a person's merits, however those merits are acquired. Predestination arises from election. Election to glory is the prior condition of predestination to grace, an order that we would be foolish in any way to qualify, as (in Calvin's view), this quibble of Thomas's was inclined to.

It may be thought that Calvin was himself quibbling at this point, since while Aquinas argues (for example) that 'we may say that God pre-ordains that he will give glory because of merit, and also pre-ordains that he will give grace to a person in order to merit glory', nevertheless when we consider predestination 'in its whole sweep . . . the effect of predestination in its completeness cannot have any cause on our part':⁶⁸

Let us proceed accordingly; predestination as an effect can be considered in two ways, as to its parts and in its entirety. When analysed [into its parts]

⁶⁷ *Inst.* III. 22.9.

⁶⁸ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia 23.5.

we find nothing to stop one effect of predestination from being the motive and reason of another, so that a later effect may be the cause of an earlier according to a system of final causality, and an earlier of a later according to a system of meritorious causality, which comes back to having the material properly disposed. Thus we may say that God pre-ordains that he will give glory on account of merit, and also pre-ordains that he will give grace to a person in order to merit glory.⁶⁹

That is, a sculptor may shape his marble in just *this* way because of what he has decided to sculpt, and also the final shape of his work is due partly to its earlier shapes.

So why is Calvin so hard on Aquinas? Perhaps because Thomas's treatment was tending to be dominated by a regard for Aristotelian causality rather than the plain word of Scripture. Perhaps. But Calvin himself made good use of Aristotelian causality from time to time. The answer must be that Calvin was appalled by the interposition of the term 'merit.' Whenever he came across any approving reference to creaturely merit, however qualified, even in his favourite, Augustine, he saw red.⁷⁰ So his complaint is not against the nature of providence and predestination as Thomas understood these—in these areas there is broad agreement—but against Thomas's overcleverness in toying with the idea of creaturely merit, and particularly his countenancing of the idea of meriting glory.

Finally, we look beyond Calvin, to the treatment of predestination in the period of the *Westminster Confession*.

PROVIDENCE AND PURITANISM

'Scholastic' and 'Scholasticism', at least when used of Reformed theology, are frequently terms of abuse and are used to imply degeneracy and deformation, a theological fall from the purity of the creative theological genius of John Calvin. Those who charge the later generations of Reformed theologians with scholasticism do so in the spirit of Ecclesiastes 7: 29: 'God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes.' And the schemes allegedly searched out by the Reformed Orthodox *are* many. They are variously accused of arid rationalism, of adopting a theological methodology which was deductive and foundational, based upon the divine decrees; of evolving a natural theology in the place of the revelational theology of the Reformers; of

⁶⁹ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia 23.5.

⁷⁰ See his discussion at *Inst.* III.15.2.

replacing Calvin's warm, direct Christocentrism with speculative hair-splitting; and of compromising Calvin's gospel of unconditional grace. Thus it is said that 'later Reformed writers are better described as philosophical, rather than biblical theologians . . . concerned with metaphysical and speculative questions.'⁷¹ 'With Perkins we can see, as with Beza, a more severe, more speculative and less biblical version of the doctrine of grace, lacking Calvin's attempt to give it christocentric emphasis.'⁷²

Most of these charges are ill-defined, and some of them cancel each other out. As we noted in Chapter 2, the federal theology of later Calvinism, championed as a movement away from rationalism to a more biblical, historically oriented theological method, was in fact sympathetic to Cartesianism, at the same time that Cartesianism was being excoriated by high Calvinists such as Voetius. So on the not unreasonable test of sympathy for Descartes the allegedly non-rationalist federal theologians were rationalistically inclined, while those accused of being rationalists, the high Calvinists, were not.⁷³

Other charges of rationalism are clearly at odds with the facts; with the fact, for example, that some of the divines who stand accused of aridity reveal themselves as masters of experiential divinity. But this is sufficient for them then to stand accused of another set of charges: introspectionism, legalism, preparationism, and much else. Other scholars on the Reformed theology of this period, without using the term 'scholastic', have claimed to discern sharp discontinuity, and even a theological reaction, between the theology—particularly the soteriology—of Calvin and the Westminster Divines.⁷⁴

This is not the place to address all these charges as they are levelled against Puritanism and the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. The charges as they relate to Reformed theology more generally are in any case now being given a fair assessment in the literature.⁷⁵ What I will endeavour to do is to consider such charges as they relate to one prominent chapter in the

⁷¹ Alistair E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 212.

⁷² Hall, 'Calvin against the Calvinists', 29, quoted by Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree* (Durham, N.C.: Labyrinth, 1986), 8. On this charge see Richard A. Muller, 'Perkins' *A Golden Chaine*: Predestinarian System or Schematized *Ordo Salutis*?, *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 9/1 (1978), 69–81.

⁷³ Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 7.

⁷⁴ See, for example, R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979). For critical comment on Kendall's claims see Paul Helm, *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982).

⁷⁵ See, for example, Richard Muller, *After Calvin*.

Westminster Confession of Faith: chapter 5, 'Of Providence.'⁷⁶ I will evaluate the charge of scholasticism and rationalism by a review of this Westminster document and the writing of John Arrowsmith, one of the Westminster Divines, on the same theme.

The *Confession's* treatment of divine providence follows on from the chapters on God, God's eternal decree, and his work as Creator. So there is a logical, natural order: each of the chapters II–V presupposes the material of the immediately preceding one. But it does not follow from this that each Chapter is *deduced from* the earlier material. The framers of the *Confession* sought to ground each of their assertions in the text of Scripture, while recognizing that in our thought about these matters there is a logical order. One cannot sensibly consider the decree of God without first establishing the existence of God, and his work of creation and providence is the unfolding of his decree. So if 'scholasticism' means 'deduction from an axiom asserting the eternal decree of God', the chapter on providence in the *Confession* is emphatically not a piece of scholastic theology.

But is the chapter scholastic in some other sense which reveals its degeneracy from primitive Calvinism? We will attempt to answer this question by first briefly summarizing what the chapter on providence asserts.

To begin with, it maintains the theocentric teaching of the earlier chapters. Providence is an expression of the creatorship of God; the Lord governs his creation to the praise of his glory. All events, whether they are instances of laws of nature ('necessary'), or of human choices ('free'), or of unforeseen happenings ('contingent'), or miracles, and including the Fall itself, are in the direct control of God. So the *Confession* asserts that providence is all-encompassing and particular; nothing escapes, nor ever has or can; divine providence is both macroscopic and microscopic in its scope. The wording of the *Confession* is emphatic on this point, for, having stated that God 'doth uphold, direct, dispose and govern all creatures, actions and things, from the greatest even to the least', it proceeds to stress that this control, even where it extends to the 'first fall, and all other sins of angels and men' is not a bare permission, 'but such as

⁷⁶ According to B. B. Warfield the chapter 'Of Providence' went through the hands of the Assembly of Divines in the following order: 'On July 16, 1645, it was "Ordered The first Committee to prepare the Confession of Faith upon...the works of Creation and Providence". On November 27, there was "report made from the First Committee about Providence." It was debated November 28, December 2 and 4; and reviewed and ordered June 19, 1646. The Scriptural proofs were debated on January 28, 29 and February 1; and they were reviewed April 6, 1647. The chapter was debated in the House of Commons, October 2, 1647' (Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), 108).

hath joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding, and otherwise ordering and governing of them.⁷⁷

So God governs every minute particular of his creation, even the sins of men and angels, without himself being tainted by sin or approving of it. At the same time the wording of the chapter strongly affirms the responsibility and culpability of the wicked. The sinfulness of sin ‘proceedeth only from the creature, and not from God.’

The concluding paragraphs (V–VII) make three practical applications of the doctrine set forth. The first asserts that the providence of God is not at odds with the fact that at times the children of God suffer. In his wisdom God by his providence may order suffering so as to chastise, to humble them, to increase their dependence on him and to make them more watchful. Similarly God hardens ‘wicked and ungodly men’ by withholding grace and withdrawing gifts from them. Finally, and by way of summary, the *Confession* asserts (VII) that while the providence of God extends to all, he takes particular care of his Church, for whom all things are made to work together for their good—a theme common to both Aquinas and Calvin, as we have seen. Far from presenting the doctrine of providence in an arid or a merely academic way, the Divines strive to relate it to the practicalities of Christian life and experience.

So far we have seen that the treatment of providence cannot fairly be accused of scholasticism in that it is not deductive, nor is it dry and theoretical in temper. There is a further noteworthy feature of this chapter which marks it off from certain kinds of scholasticism in theology. At no point in their treatment of providence do the Divines offer a *theory* of divine providence, an account of how it can be that God can remain pure while ordaining the minutest particulars of evil actions, or of how men and women remain responsible for their actions even though all their actions are governed by divine providence.

Why is this? I suggest that it is because, in their concise summaries of Christian doctrine, they wished to adhere as closely as possible to Scripture. And because they could find no theory of providence in Scripture, no statement of how it is that God is both the governor of all things good and evil and yet remains untainted, and evil men are still responsible for those sins which God in his providence ordains, they did not offer a theory as part of the Church’s public confession of faith. In this respect the chapter on providence may be said to be resolutely *a posteriori* in intent. The

⁷⁷ For further discussion of the statements of the *Westminster Confession* on the decree of God see Paul Helm, ‘Of God’s Eternal Decree’, in Lynn Quigley (ed.), *Reformed Theology in Contemporary Perspective* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2006).

Divines do not approach providence in an a priori fashion, imposing a set of ideas on the raw data of Scripture, but by a process of induction they attempt to formulate such a doctrine from the canonical documents, going as far as, but no farther than, they judge those documents warrant.

This is also the reason why the chapter on providence cannot be thought of as scholastic in yet another sense, in the sense that it depends upon a natural theology, a theology arrived at by some general appeal to what all men consider to be true or reasonable. It is certainly possible to attempt to build up an account of providence in this way, and the attempt has been made; in deism, for example. But there is not a trace of such an approach in the *Confession*. There is nothing, for example, that approaches the language of David Hume's Cleanthes:

Look round the world: Contemplate the whole and every part of it: You will find it to be nothing but one great machine, subdivided into an infinite number of lesser machines, which again admit of subdivisions, to a degree beyond what human senses and faculties can trace and explain. All these various machines, and even their most minute parts, are adjusted to each other with an accuracy, which ravishes into admiration all men, who have ever contemplated them.⁷⁸

There is no appeal to what is reasonable, to clear and distinct ideas, to natural light, or to what may be judged to be probable on the basis of human experience alone. Rather, in a way which no doubt some may regard as tedious and hidebound, because the compilers of the *Confession* seek to ground their assertions about divine providence on the assertions of Holy Scripture, they give prominence to the 'unsearchable wisdom' of God. Thus in asserting that God orders all things to fall out according to the natures of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently, the authors of the *Confession* cite Genesis 8: 22 and Jeremiah 31: 35 as proof of God's ordering of necessary secondary causes; Exodus 21: 13, Deuteronomy 19: 5, and I Kings 20: 34 as proof of his ordering of contingent secondary causes; and Isaiah 9: 6, 7 as proof of his ordering of free secondary causes.⁷⁹

It is at this point in the chapter on providence that the only concession that is made in the direction of theorizing about divine providence, namely the use of the distinction between primary and secondary causes, is introduced. As we have just noted, according to the *Confession* God

⁷⁸ *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779), ed. J. C. A. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 45.

⁷⁹ For a brief account of the textual and exegetical background to the work of the Westminster Divines see Richard A. Muller, 'Scripture and the Westminster Confession', in Richard A. Muller and Rowland S. Ward (eds.), *Scripture and Worship* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P. & R., 2007).

‘ordereth them [all things] to fall out according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.’ In this way, the *Confession* asserts that natural events and human actions are the secondary causes of what they bring to pass, while it implies (though it does not assert) that God is the primary cause. Is the use of the distinction between primary and secondary causes an example of scholasticism? Perhaps it is. Certainly the medieval scholastics used it. But if it is evidence of scholasticism then John Calvin is also a scholastic, since (as we will shortly be reminded) he also uses the distinction in his elucidation of the doctrine of providence.

So far we have briefly surveyed some of the ways in which the *Confession*’s chapter on providence might be said to be scholastic, and the reasonable conclusion is that it is scholastic in none of them. But there is one way in which the influence of scholasticism may be discerned. A characteristic of scholasticism in the medieval period is that it developed theology in a highly technical way; by means of the *disputatio*, and the use of carefully formulated distinctions, and by the use of definition and argument theological topics were carefully discriminated, and discussed with equal care. There is no doubt that the influence of scholasticism in this sense may be discerned in the chapter on providence. For in that chapter, as throughout the *Confession*, there is a premium placed on precise and economical turns of phrase. Central Christian doctrines are defended against many errors in few words. As B. B. Warfield judged the compilers of the *Confession of Faith*,

[the] authors were men of learning and philosophic grasp; but above all of piety. Their interest was not in speculative construction, but in the protection of their flocks from deadly error. It results from the very nature of the case, therefore, that it is a religious document which they have given us. And the nicety of its balance in conceiving and the precision of its language in stating truth, will seem to us scholastic only in proportion as our religious life is less developed than theirs.⁸⁰

There is little by way of rhetorical flourish. Issues are stated—or rather understated—in a calm and concise way. In this sense, but in this sense only, can the *Confession*, including its chapter on providence, be regarded as ‘scholastic.’ But it is precisely as used in this sense that ‘scholastic’ is presentational rather than theologically substantive.

Additional collateral evidence for the claim that there is no substantive theological difference between the *Westminster Confession of Faith*’s

⁸⁰ ‘The Significance of the Westminster Standards as a Creed’, in *The Selected Shorter Writings of B. B. Warfield*, ii, ed. John E. Meeter (Nutley, N.J.: P. & R., 1973), 662.

teaching on providence and the earlier teaching of John Calvin, none at least due to the malign influence of ‘scholasticism’, can be obtained in a less direct fashion.

John Arrowsmith (1602–59) was a leading Westminster Divine,⁸¹ a member of the Cambridge Puritan establishment, and a friend of Antony Tuckney, whom we met in Chapter 3. While Master of St John’s College, Cambridge, (he was later to be Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, and also Regius Professor of Divinity) he began to write a systematic theology designed in the form of thirty aphorisms with corresponding exercitations. Only six aphorisms and sets of exercitations were finished at his death. The work was posthumously published in 1659 as *Armillæ Catechetica: A Chain of Principles*.

His *A Chain of Principles* contains a treatment of divine providence. Unlike either Calvin or the *Confession*, Arrowsmith starts from the fact that human life is a mixture of prosperity and adversity, and draws practical lessons—for example that God allows such a mixture to magnify his goodness, and to be known to be the Sovereign Lord of all persons and things⁸²—for the life of faith in typically Puritan fashion.

Then, in the last aphorism of the work, he proceeds to discuss providence in a more formal way. ‘Providence extends it self, not onely to all created beings, and to all humane affairs, especially those that concern the Church: but even to the sins of Angels and men.’⁸³ As we have seen, this is essentially the same teaching as Calvin’s and the *Confession*’s. Arrowsmith proceeds to ‘demonstrate’ these claims, this demonstration consisting of the provision of scriptural proofs. For example, the proposition that divine providence extends itself to all created beings is demonstrated from Nehemiah 9: 6 and a number of other texts. He then proceeds in a similar fashion to demonstrate the truth of the proposition that divine providence extends to all human affairs,⁸⁴ distinguishing between economical, civil, military, moral, and ecclesiastical affairs. These are treated in turn in the same way, scriptural proofs being provided for each.

In Exercitation 2, God’s providential care over the Church is given the same treatment. The third Exercitation concerns God’s concurrence with

⁸¹ William Hetherington states that following this appointment Arrowsmith attended the Assembly only occasionally (*History of the Westminster Assembly of Divines* (Edinburgh: Gemmell, 1878), 306). However, the minutes of the Assembly record that he delivered the Report ‘of Justification and Adoption’ (XI and XII) which was agreed on 23 July 1646 (*Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines*, ed. A. F. Mitchell and J. Struthers (Edinburgh/London: Blackwood, 1874), 259).

⁸² *A Chain of Principles* (Cambridge: Field, 1659), 389.

⁸³ Arrowsmith 400. ⁸⁴ Arrowsmith 405.

sinful actions. 'Divine providence is an actour even in sin it self. I shall single out hardness of heart, a sin common to all sorts of men, though in different degrees.'⁸⁵ Partial hardness may occur in the elect, total hardness in the reprobate; in each degree of hardness 'the providence of God is an actor.'⁸⁶ Arrowsmith goes into some detail as to how this can be. Among the ways he mentions are that God hardens hearts by 'privation', and by denying his blessing, by permitting evil. ('Although he frequently permit it, yet we must say he is not altogether willing to have it, however willing to suffer it.'⁸⁷)

There is undoubtedly some development here, and in a way in which perhaps Calvin himself would not have altogether welcomed. For Calvin did not favour the use of Augustine's idea of evil as a privation.⁸⁸ Yet Arrowsmith relies on that idea in his account of providence and evil. There is also a tendency to offer explanations of *how* it can be that God's providence extends to evil, a tendency that we saw was absent both in the *Confession* and in Calvin. For even where Calvin appears to intend to tell us how God's impulse comes to pass in men (as in *Inst.* I.18.2) he does so not by using a metaphysical idea such as the privative nature of evil, but simply by reaffirming the scriptural teaching (as Calvin understood it) that God works inwardly in men's minds.

Yet the significance of this use of the Augustinian idea of evil as a privation (a development or degeneracy, as you prefer) ought not to be exaggerated. In going into further, and perhaps questionable, detail as to how it is possible for the providence of God to encompass the evil actions of men, Arrowsmith is explicitly endorsing the doctrine both of Calvin and of the *Confession*. By his use of the idea of evil as a privation he could be said to be offering a gloss on V.III of the *Confession*, or on book I chapter 18 of the *Institutes*. What he is making use of here is not the scholasticism of natural theology, nor is he attempting to make deductions from the divine decree treated in axiomatic fashion, nor is he attempting a rationalistic reconstruction of this tenet of the faith, but he is nevertheless endeavouring by this distinction to gain further understanding of what he already firmly believes, very much in the tradition of 'faith seeking understanding.'

⁸⁵ Arrowsmith 438.

⁸⁶ Arrowsmith 451.

⁸⁷ Arrowsmith 455.

⁸⁸ 'I will not repeat here with Augustine what yet I willingly accept from him as true: There is nothing positive in sin and evil: for this subtlety does not satisfy many. For myself, I take another principle: Whatever things are done wrongly and unjustly by man, these very things are right and just works of God' (*Concerning The Eternal Predestination of God*, 169).

REVIEW

This chapter has plotted one trajectory of ideas and formulations regarding divine providence from Aquinas, via Calvin, to Arrowsmith. If a comparison is made within this fairly constant outlook, it is striking that as far as one can see in Anglophone Calvinism, by comparison with Continental Calvinism, in the treatment of providence there is little interest in those aspects of ‘philosophy’ which concern nature, ‘natural philosophy.’ The scope of discussion of divine providence is restricted to general statements about divine conservation and concurrence and destining, and practical uses of providence by the pious. By contrast, it seems that Continental Reformed theologians such as Jerome Zanchius and Lambert Danaeus, and of course Gisbert Voetius, not only asserted the harmony and efficacy of primary and secondary causes on what they regarded as biblical grounds, but also had things to say about the philosophical nature of created individuals and, as we have seen, took up a variety of stances regarding Scripture and philosophy. They were therefore either alarmed by Cartesian mechanism, or they were attracted by it. But they were at least engaged by the issues, issues raised in areas that intersected both with Scripture and common sense as well as with developments in science. What was it that led them to become interested in ‘physico-theology’?⁸⁹

Arrowsmith’s work on providence was the product of the 1640s and 1650s. Its insulation from philosophical and scientific issues was despite the fact that there was some theological traffic between Great Britain and Holland during this period. For example, Samuel Rutherford was called to a chair of theology at Utrecht, and one at Hardwyk, and William Twisse was offered a position in Franeker. A little later on the Platonistically minded Puritan John Howe (1630–1705), sometime Chaplain to Oliver Cromwell, and who spent 1687–8 in Utrecht, discussed the views of Spinoza in part II chapter 1 of his *The Living Temple* (1708). There is little evidence that Arrowsmith’s outlook reflected the somewhat wider perspective of Reformed theology on the Continent. As we noted in Chapter 2, a generation earlier in Holland, in a rather far-seeing way, Voetius had anticipated the occasionalism inherent in the mechanistic proposals of Descartes. Occasionalism can arise from two different sources, operating either separately or together. One is a strong doctrine of divine sovereignty according to which God is the only efficient cause operating in

⁸⁹ For discussion of these Reformed thinkers in the context of the history of physico theology see the section on van Ruler in Chapter 3.

the universe. The occasionalism of Jonathan Edwards and of some medievalists was of this kind. And it can arise from a weakening of the idea of secondary causality which, Voetius believed, was a logical consequence of Descartes's mechanistic philosophy, and also of what were perceived to be unwelcome implications of Cartesian views of the interaction between body and mind. What the explanation is of Arrowsmith's rather conventional, scholastic approach is not clear.

In general, English Puritanism seems, at this time at least, to have been intellectually narrower than its Continental equivalent. It is hard to explain why this is. Perhaps it was due to the nature of the curriculum of theological training, or the upheavals of the seventeenth century and the plight of the Church in that era. Was it also that there was, by and large, less interest in the systematization of theology, and so of developments in philosophy? Yet even in a work such as *The Court of the Gentiles* (1669–77), by Theophilus Gale (1628–78), a massive discussion of 'Christian philosophy', there is no evidence of an interest in physical nature. Was it that pastoral and ecclesiastical problems of an immediate kind swamped everything else? Is there evidence that the high-ups in Puritan Oxbridge—Tuckney and Arrowsmith in Cambridge, and Thomas Goodwin and John Owen in Oxford, say—were in these years preparing the way for a curriculum in which the study of physical nature figured? I do not know of any. Could it have been that it was simply assumed that a broad, perhaps very broad, Aristotelianism, echoing common sense and supported by as well as supporting key scriptural texts, was the timeless scientific truth of the matter? Could it have been that in their lack of interest in physical science the Puritans were in fact closer to Calvin than were their Continental brothers? Without reopening the issues discussed earlier, this seems unlikely. Calvin had a lively interest in astronomy, though this did not lead him to see the need for any direct conversation between theology and natural philosophy, much less an attempt at an integration of them. There is no evidence that the English Puritan theologians were genuinely interested in physical nature.

It is sometimes claimed Puritanism gave birth to modern science.⁹⁰ Perhaps it did, in the sense that it created a climate for Harvey and Boyle and Wilkins and Locke and, of course, Newton to flourish in. But if there was such a climate, it seems to have arisen *per accidens*, unwittingly, not as part of the inner thrust of Puritan theology. As it was, when Puritanism as

⁹⁰ R. Hooykaas, *Religion and the Rise of Modern Science* (Edinburgh/London: Scottish Academic Press/Chatto & Windus, 1972).

a movement was defeated and swept away,⁹¹ it was Lockean philosophy and Newtonian physics and the deism that followed that contributed to the overthrow not only of the Puritan political and ecclesiastical hegemony, but of Puritan theology itself.

⁹¹ See the two contrasting portraits of John Owen's and Thomas Goodwin's reactions to political defeat, in Christopher Hill, *The Experience of Defeat: Milton and Some Contemporaries* (London: Faber, 1984), ch. 6.

The Atonement

Two views of the atonement appear to be present in Calvin's writings. The first, the main view, is to be found expounded *in extenso* in the *Institutes* and elsewhere. It ascribes a necessity to the atonement. Calvin's way of expressing this necessity is of the form: Given state of affairs S, the bringing about of state of affairs T is necessary to rectify S optimally, in a way that is best for us. So we find the following representative statements:

It deeply concerned us, that he who was to be our Mediator should be very God and very man. If the necessity be inquired into, it was not what is commonly termed simple or absolute, but flowed from the divine decree on which the salvation of man depended. What was best for us, our most merciful Father determined . . . The case was certainly desperate, if the Godhead itself did not descend to us, it being impossible for us to ascend. Thus the Son of God behaved to become our Immanuel, i.e. God with us.¹

So given the state of affairs that there is need of human salvation, and that salvation is God's purpose, then it is necessary that God the Son become God with us. We need a Saviour who is none other than God himself. But then it is also necessary that man should offer obedience to God's justice and pay sin's penalty.² So we need a Saviour who is as truly human as we are, offering obedience. At this point the emphasis falls upon the real humanity of the Incarnate one:

Another principal part of our reconciliation with God was, that man, who had lost himself by his disobedience, should, by way of remedy, oppose to it obedience, satisfy the justice of God, and pay the penalty of sin. Therefore, our Lord came forth very man, adopted the person of Adam, and assumed his name, that he might in his stead obey the Father; that he might present our flesh as the price of satisfaction to the just judgment of God, and in the same flesh pay the penalty which we had incurred.³

This is a 'principal part', though the term 'necessary' does not occur. Nevertheless, Calvin's repeated rhetorical questions 'Who but . . .?' in

¹ *Inst.* II.12.1.

² *Inst.* II.12.3.

³ *Inst.* II.12.3.

this section clearly indicate his view that it was only the God-man, acting as redeemer, who could conquer sin and procure righteousness.

There are other places where Calvin does use the modal term ‘necessary’; for example, ‘Even had Adam not lost his integrity, he would, with the angels, have been like to God; and yet it would not therefore have been necessary [*neque tamen propterea necesse fuisset*] that the Son of God should become either a man or an angel.’⁴ The Incarnation was only necessary on account of the failure of Adam’s uprightness. This was in reply to Andreas Osiander, who to Calvin’s annoyance held that the Incarnation would have occurred even if there had been no Fall. Calvin’s claim, rather similar, that Christ exercises mediatorship without Incarnation⁵ is explained by the fact that for Calvin ‘divine mediatorship’ is a generic term of which mediatorship by Incarnation is one species. On the other hand, no proposal that there might have been atonement in some other way, without divine satisfaction, is in view here, or elsewhere in the *Institutes*.

Note here that the question raised by Osiander is not whether there could be atonement without Incarnation (and so without blood-shedding) but whether there could have been Incarnation without atonement, without the need for any decree(s) to atone. I can’t see that here Calvin thinks it possible that Christ could have been a redeemer though not human, but rather he is stating that he is not prepared to speculate on whether he could have been human though not a redeemer. Certainly the ‘eternal decree’ respecting the actual atonement, in so far as it is a free decree, was a decree that might not have been, but it is not free in the sense that there might have been some other way of salvation.

Apart from this, on the evidence of II.12.5 Calvin is simply making the point that to consider whether Incarnation apart from atonement is possible is speculative in the face of statements of Scripture showing that ‘by the eternal decree of God the two things were in fact connected together’.⁶ No decree establishing the necessity of blood-shedding prior to or apart from some other decree is in view here, or elsewhere. The same is true of what Calvin says in the context of another debate with Osiander, this time in connection with the nature of justification:

We, indeed, do not divide Christ, but hold that he who, reconciling us to God in his flesh, bestowed righteousness upon us, is the eternal Word of God; and that he could not perform the office of Mediator, not acquire righteousness for us, if he were not the eternal God.⁷

⁴ *Inst.* II.12.7.

⁵ *Inst.* II.12.4.

⁶ *Inst.* II.12.5.

⁷ *Inst.* III.11.8.

This seems fairly clear: righteousness *could not* have been acquired for us except through a mediator who is eternal God. It was thus necessary that our redeemer be the God-man. There are other places, also, in which although Calvin does not use the term ‘necessity’, his language seems clearly to imply it—as in this passage, drawn from the same debate with Osiander:

For although Christ could neither purify our souls by his own blood, nor appease the Father by his sacrifice, nor acquit us from the charge of guilt, nor, in short, perform the office of a priest, unless he had been very God, because no human ability was equal to such a burden, it is however certain, that he performed all these things in his human nature.⁸

In order for Christ to cleanse and appease he had to be true God. This seems to imply that only God himself, in the person of his incarnate Son, could fulfil the office of a priest.

However, we should note that the necessity of the Incarnation, according to Calvin, was not an ‘absolute necessity’ but that it ‘flowed from the divine decree.’⁹ Does not this further condition, the interposition of a divine decree, alter things? Does this not make the necessity of the atonement into a consequential necessity? Once the decree to redeem by the suffering of the God-man has been established, then obviously enough the suffering is necessary. It is necessary given the decree. Is this what Calvin means? To try to answer this, we must ask what exactly it was that God was decreeing. Is Calvin presupposing that reconciliation (by some means or other) is necessary, but that the means of reconciliation, by Incarnation, is at God’s discretion? Does the decree concern the basic fact of reconciliation or the nature of the reconciliation? Is Calvin saying, we would not have been reconciled at all but for the heavenly decree? Or is he saying, we would not have been reconciled by a mediator who is both true God and true man but for a heavenly decree? Or does the heavenly decree govern both these matters? It is not clear that in this passage, at least, Calvin clearly separates them in his mind. ‘What was best for us, our most merciful Father determined’ refers to whatever is necessary and sufficient to deliver us from our plight, and the point of what follows is to establish that only the descent of the very majesty of God would manage that.

Where is there any evidence at this point in his discussion that Calvin even considered a more abstract, voluntaristic decree about the necessity of blood-shedding? He habitually conflates the fact of reconciliation with its mode. He does not even hint that our reconciliation is necessary but the

⁸ *Inst.* III.11.9.

⁹ *Inst.* II.12.1.

mode of reconciliation is contingent, and so depends upon the discretion of the divine will. This stress on the one decree is taken up later, in a passage which several commentators have understood in a voluntarist way.¹⁰

So it appears that in these passages Calvin conflates two questions, seeing no need to separate them. But they are in fact distinct. The first is: In order for there to be reconciliation, did there have to be pardon? Calvin gives an affirmative answer. The second is: Given that there had to be pardon, who but the God-man could procure pardon? Calvin's rhetorical question answers itself. However, it is possible to suppose that an affirmative answer to the question 'Did there have to be pardon?' must be given, but that there could be a number of alternative possible answers to the question 'How is pardon to be procured?' Although Calvin here takes these questions as one question, not as two, we can in fact separate them.

In order to help clarify such matters in the discussions that are to follow, let us make some further distinctions. Terms such as 'hypothetical' and 'necessary' and 'absolute' have been variously used in regard to the atonement. In order to shape the subsequent discussion the following distinctions are offered:

- (1) Necessarily, given the fact of sin, there is to be reconciliation via the God-man.
- (2) Necessarily, given the fact of sin, if there is to be reconciliation, then it will be via the God-man.

and

- (3) Given the fact of sin, if there is to be reconciliation, then possibly it will be via the God-man.

I will call (1) the *absolute* view, (2) the *necessary* view, and (3) the *hypothetical* view of the atonement. Calvin's denial of (1) seems to follow from his reference to the heavenly decree, even if other matters are more debatable. For Calvin, it is not an absolutely necessary matter that there is salvation at all, even granted the Fall. He does not appear to write about the necessity to restore the human race, or to provide human substitutes for the fallen angels, as Augustine and Anselm did.¹¹

¹⁰ But the two places where Calvin invokes the decree (*Inst.* II.12.1 and II.17.1) are identical in thought and not, I believe, susceptible of a voluntarist interpretation as regards the mode of atonement. (I discuss the second passage in *John Calvin's Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 344–5.)

¹¹ See Augustine, *The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*, trans. J. F. Shaw (Chicago, Ill.: Regnery, 1961), 29, and Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, ed. with an introd. Brian Davies and Gillian Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), i. 16–18.

Given that there is a free decree of reconciliation, there are necessary and hypothetical variants of this—corresponding to whether reconciliation is thought of as necessarily by atonement/satisfaction by the God-man, or in some other way. In my view, the material in the *Institutes* that we have considered so far is consistent with the denial of (1) and of (3) and the affirming of (2), as the passages just discussed suggest. But in the light of other data which we will shortly consider Calvin sometimes elsewhere than in the *Institutes* endorses a version of (3).

As we have seen, the first feature of our reconciliation that Calvin notes is that it was necessary that our redeemer be true God in the person of his only-begotten Son;¹² that is, that redemption should be divinely procured. The ‘second requirement’ is that God’s Son should become Incarnate by taking ‘the person and the name of Adam.’¹³ To the seasoned ear the two positions taken by Calvin here, the necessity of the Son redeeming, and the necessity of the Son taking on human nature to do so, have a decidedly Anselmian ring to them. I will argue that each ‘requirement’ corresponds to the main two features regarding the atonement that constitute Anselm’s project in *Cur Deus Homo*, though it has to be said that Calvin rarely quotes or refers to Anselm directly. There is in fact only one quotation from Anselm in the *Institutes*, at II.2.4, and this has no connection with the atonement. So in drawing attention to Calvin’s Anselmianism I am not claiming any direct literary influence of the *Cur Deus Homo* on Calvin. It may simply be that Anselmianism was in the air of the circles in which Calvin first learned theology, or that he gained his Anselmianism in ways that we cannot now discern.¹⁴

How Anselmian was Calvin? There are two features of Anselmianism that I wish to highlight. The first is the general point that Anselm was a perfect-being theologian, perhaps the perfect-being theologian par excellence. That God is a being than which no greater, or more excellent, can be conceived, is an indispensable premise of the ontological argument. In the *Proslogion* he proceeds to derive an entire theology from the consideration that God is the most perfect being, and that since there is a whole range of properties that it is better to have than not to have, then God must have those properties.¹⁵ God is maximally good. In creating and redeeming,

¹² *Inst.* II.12.2.

¹³ *Inst.* II.12.3.

¹⁴ Of course, even where a writer supplies textual support for his view it does not follow that this support is the source of his view.

¹⁵ On this, and on perfect being theology more generally, see Katherin A. Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000).

God must do what is best overall, for only such an outcome befits the most perfect being. We will need to keep in mind this general Anselmian outlook in what follows.

But then, more relevantly for us, there are Anselm's projects in his famous work on the atonement, *Cur Deus Homo*, that we have already mentioned. These projects could perhaps be understood as Anselm setting forth a view of an atonement than which no greater can be conceived. But perhaps they are better seen as a more modest endeavour of faith seeking understanding, albeit in the distinctively Anselmian manner.

ANSELM'S PROJECTS

In the preface to the *Cur Deus Homo* Anselm sets out two aims, to be taken up in the two books of the work. The first is to show that only God incarnate could save—not merely that it was *fitting* that God himself should save, but that it was *necessary*. Second, in book II, he argues that mankind will be saved, but only through Christ the God-man. It is necessary that God become incarnate in human nature so that human nature, body and soul, be redeemed. These projects appear to cover more ground than Calvin's 'two requirements'. For Anselm argues not only that the Incarnation is necessary for human redemption, but that human redemption is also inevitable, in order that the divine purpose behind man's creation in the first place should be finally attained. As Anselm sees it, the fall into sin thwarted or interrupted the divine purpose for mankind. If that purpose is not to be defeated, then there has to be a way of restoring mankind. As we have already noted, there is no evidence that Calvin follows him in this, but also no occasion (as far as I am aware) on which he denies it. However, the central areas of agreement are Anselm's claims that redemption is not possible without Incarnation, and that any redeemer must be divine. Interestingly, this is not only because only a divine Saviour is capable of redeeming; there is another reason:

Do you not understand that, supposing any other person were to rescue man from eternal death, man would rightly be judged his bondsman? If he were this, he would in no way have been restored to that dignity which he would have had in the future, if he had not sinned.¹⁶

But the impossibility of God forgiving sin out of mercy alone¹⁷ makes it clear that the need for satisfaction is central. Sin needs to be punished in order to be forgiven; otherwise it is 'unregulated':

¹⁶ *Cur Deus Homo*, 270.

¹⁷ *Cur Deus Homo*, 284 5.

Sinfulness is in a position of greater freedom, if it is forgiven through mercy alone, than righteousness—and this seems extremely unfitting. And the incongruity extends even further: it makes sinfulness resemble God. For just as God is subject to no law, the same is the case with sinfulness.¹⁸

And in book II:

If, therefore, as is agreed, it is necessary that the heavenly city should have its full complement made up by members of the human race, and this cannot be the case if the recompense of which we have spoken is not paid, which no one can pay except God, and no one ought to pay except man: it is necessary that a God-Man should pay it.¹⁹

So for Anselm the logic of the atonement is not governed only by the nature of sin as an offence against God, but also by the purpose for which mankind was created, and the need to restore mankind to that purpose. And, further, that atonement is necessary in order to preserve the honour of God:

It is a necessary consequence, therefore, that either the honour which has been taken away should be repaid, or punishment should follow. Otherwise, either God will not be just to himself, or he will be without the power to enforce either of the two options; and it is an abominable sin even to consider this possibility.²⁰

If the divine Wisdom did not impose these forms of recompense in cases where wrongdoing is endeavouring to upset the right order of things, there would be in the universe, which God ought to be regulating, a certain ugliness, resulting from the violation of the beauty of order, and God would appear to be failing in his governance. Since these two consequences are as impossible as they are unfitting, it is inevitable that recompense or punishment follows upon every sin.²¹

So sin must either be punished by the punishment of the offender, or it must be atoned for by another. It cannot be merely forgiven by an act of will alone. Such an act would be arbitrary and unprincipled. God must uphold his honour. The necessity for God to uphold his own honour is also a necessary truth for Anselm, another aspect of what Anselm means by the nature of things.

So what does Anselm mean when he says that he is undertaking to argue for the necessity of the Incarnation *as if Christ did not exist*? What he is in effect saying is ‘Let us put from our minds the fact that, according to Scripture and the testimony of the Church, Christ has in fact come in our nature; I will show that given certain facts about God and ourselves, about the divine will, and the nature of human sin, if there is to be redemption then Christ had to become incarnate.’

¹⁸ *Cur Deus Homo*, 284.

¹⁹ *Cur Deus Homo*, 320.

²⁰ *Cur Deus Homo*, 287.

²¹ *Cur Deus Homo*, 289; see also 287.

Given that Jesus Christ the Son of God came into the world to save sinners, it looks like his coming was a historical event, and so contingent. Yet if it can be shown that a proposition such as 'The Son of God came into the world to save sinners' is necessitated by other propositions, propositions about God's nature, for example, which are themselves necessarily true, then what may seem to be contingent or arbitrary will be shown not to be. It will have been demonstrated that the central tenet of the Christian faith must be grounded in the nature of God's character and so not be adventitious or arbitrary. Faith in the fact of the Incarnation and atonement will thereby have gained understanding.

If something is unconditionally or categorically necessary it applies universally, both to God and man. But if God wills something, there is no categorical necessity about this. He need not have willed it. If he does will a certain goal, then there may be certain requirements that are logically necessary for his attaining that goal. Given the divine nature, the goal chosen must be in accordance with that nature. God cannot violate the principles of his own nature. Given that God freely wills to pardon human sin, he is restricted in the type of action he can undertake in order to achieve this. If God willed to pardon human sin, and such a will is fully consistent with the divine nature, though not necessitated by it, then he could not, consistently with the nature of things, simply choose any way of achieving that end, but one way, or one type of way, of achieving it was necessitated by his nature.

But there is an objection at this point, which can be put in the form of a dilemma: either God could not have redeemed sinners by his word alone, in which case he is not omnipotent, but of only limited power, or he could have willed to save by his word alone, but chose not to, and instead chose to save through the Incarnation. In this case he is foolish, since he willed by becoming incarnate to suffer degradation for no good reason. So either God is lacking in power, or lacking in wisdom. But God is not lacking in power or wisdom. So the necessity of atonement by the God-man must be rejected.²²

Anselm's answer to this is: God was not constrained, either by logic, or by any external necessities of nature, such as the laws of physics or chemistry, to redeem humankind. But he was 'constrained' by his own nature as to how redemption should be accomplished. So there are necessities and non-necessities in the divine atonement; the non-necessities of the divine will are subsumed under the necessities of the divine nature. There

²² *Cur Deus Homo*, i. 6, 8.

is a sense in which God was 'constrained' by his own nature but, as Anselm convincingly shows, to suppose that this is a case of real constraint is to be misled by the surface grammar of the expressions in question.²³

So for Anselm, leaving aside the question of whether the atonement was absolutely necessary, if it was hypothetically necessary, and if it was at least partly conditioned by the divine nature, what else may have conditioned it? Presumably what else conditioned it, if anything did, has to do with *human* nature, with the fact that man is created body and soul, and was made for happiness, but has become sinful. Were he to remain in this condition God's purpose for mankind would fail. It is necessary that what God purposes will come to pass, and if his purpose for mankind is the restoration of the soul and the resurrection of the body then these ends must be achieved in a way that is consistent with, and is an expression of, God's nature. If indeed it is necessary that God not fail in his original purpose, and if the atonement was necessary for that, then Anselm appears to be arguing that given sin there must be atonement, that there is nothing hypothetical or conditional about it. That is, the argument takes him in the direction of an absolute view of the atonement, our sense (1).

Yet even if for Anselm the atonement is absolute, given the necessity of mankind being restored to its original purpose there is still a sense in which salvation is non-necessary in the *way* in which it is conveyed to individuals. For Anselm is not a universalist. As we have noted, he argues at some length in the *Cur Deus Homo* that the number of the redeemed must be equal to the number of the fallen angels.²⁴ Given this particularism, while God is obliged to redeem a set of men and women, a fixed number, he is (for all that Anselm tells us to the contrary) free to populate that set with whoever he chooses. So any member of the set may truly say 'I might not have been redeemed'.

A SECOND CALVIN?

So far we have seen that on the evidence provided by the *Institutes* Calvin takes the view that the atonement is hypothetically necessary for human redemption, a view that falls within the Anselmian spectrum, though it is just possible that Anselm believes that the atonement is absolutely necessary. Calvin expressed no view on the question of whether, given the Fall, the atonement was absolutely necessary. We may shortly note a reason for this

²³ On this point see Brian Leftow, 'Anselm on the Necessity of the Atonement', *Religious Studies*, 31 (June 1995), 167–85.

²⁴ *Cur Deus Homo*, i. 16–18.

silence. For besides the evidence provided by the *Institutes* there is further evidence provided by statements that Calvin makes at several times in various of his sermons and commentaries. Among these are the following:

For if God had simply proclaimed our pardon by declaring that he had decided to receive us in mercy, despite our unworthiness, that would have been a great thing. Even then, we would never have been able to utter sufficient praise for such grace. But God has given us his own Son as a token of his love. Indeed, he has given us himself through his Son, and declared himself to be our Father. This so far outshines pardon alone that even if we employed all our faculties to worship and adore, we could never perfectly praise him for such mercy.²⁵

If God pardoned us without Jesus Christ interceding for us and being made our pledge, we should think nothing of it. We should all shrug our shoulders and make it an opportunity for giving ourselves greater license. But when we see that God did not spare His only Son, but treated Him with such an extreme severity that in His Body He underwent all the sorrows that it would be possible to suffer and that even in His soul He was afflicted to the limit, to the point of crying out ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’—when we hear all this, it is impossible for us, unless we are harder than stone, not to shudder and be filled with such a fear and amazement as will utterly put us to confusion; impossible not to detest our offences and iniquities seeing that they provoke the anger of God against us in this way. This, then, is why it was necessary for all the correction of our peace to be laid upon Jesus Christ that we might find grace before God His Father.²⁶

God might have redeemed us by a single word, or by a mere act of his will, (*Poterat nos Deus verbo aut nutu redimere*) if he had not thought it better to do otherwise for our own benefit, that, by not sparing his own well-beloved Son, he might testify in his person how much he cares for our salvation. But now our hearts, if they are not softened by the inestimable sweetness of Divine Love, must be harder than stone or iron.²⁷

We must, then, learn first of all to give God the praise which he deserves. He could, indeed, have rescued us from the abyss of death in another way, but he desired to display the treasures of his infinite goodness when he did not spare his only Son. By this means our Lord Jesus Christ chose to give us a splendid token of his care for us, in willingly offering himself up to death.²⁸

²⁵ Sermon on Gal. 1: 3–5, in *John Calvin's Sermons on Galatians*, trans. Kathy Childress (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1997), 24.

²⁶ *Sermons on Isaiah's Prophecy of the Death and Passion of Christ*, trans. and ed. T. H. L. Parker (London: Clarke, 1956), 72.

²⁷ *Comm.* John 15: 13.

²⁸ Sermon on Matt. 26: 36–9, in *Joannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, ed. W. Baum, E. Cunitz, and E. Reuss (Corpus Reformatorum, vols. 29–87 (Brunswick: Schwetckhe, 1863–1900)), 46: 833.

The last passage is from the first of nine (undated) Passion sermons, preached as part of a long course of sermons on the synoptic Gospels. The series was begun in July 1559 and was still incomplete at the time of Calvin's death in 1564.²⁹ In the first few sentences of the sermon (on Matt. 26: 36–9), Calvin establishes that when it speaks of salvation Scripture has three objectives in view: to reveal God's great love for us; to awaken in us hatred of sin and a sense of humility before God; and to teach us so to value our salvation that we turn from the world and long for our heavenly inheritance. Somewhat paradoxically, a little later into the sermon Calvin implicitly denies the idea of an alternative mode of pardon, when he says:

Why did he clothe himself with our flesh and nature, if it were not to repair by his obedience the effects of our rebellion . . . ? That is why he yielded himself up to death, since we cannot be reconciled in any other way, nor appease God's wrath provoked by sin, except through his obedience.³⁰

What are we to make of this evidence? It was once thought that the sentence quoted from the commentary on John's Gospel was a Calvinian slip of the pen. William Goold, the editor of the standard edition of the works of the Puritan John Owen, stated that it was an 'isolated phrase'.³¹ But, as we have seen, the sentiments expressed in the *Commentary* are to be found elsewhere. They are not just a slip of the pen, therefore.

Two things are worth noting at this point. The first is that in making such claims Calvin recognizes that he is not innovating, and by the same token he does not regard himself as speculating when he asserts that God might have saved us by a word. He may have seen himself as following in the footsteps of Augustine, who denied the necessity of the atonement, and therefore taking up an orthodox, patristic standpoint.

In *On the Trinity* Augustine has this:

Those then who say, What, had God no other way by which He might free men from the misery of this mortality, that He should will the only-begotten Son, God co-eternal with himself, to become man, by putting on a human soul and flesh, and being made mortal to endure death?—these, I say, it is not enough so to refute, as to assert that that mode by which God deigns to free us through the

²⁹ A selection of these sermons has recently been translated into English and published as *Sermons on the Beatitudes*, trans. Robert White (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2006). I am grateful to Jon Balsarak for drawing my attention to a number of these passages, and to Robert White for his translation of the Matthew passage.

³⁰ *Calvini Opera*, 46: 835.

³¹ 'Prefatory Note' to John Owen, *A Dissertation on Divine Justice*, in *Works*, ed. W. H. Goold (1850; 3; repr. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1967), x. 482.

Mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus, is good and suitable to the dignity of God; but we must show also, not indeed that no other mode was possible to God, to whose power all things are equally subject, but that there neither was nor need have been any other way more appropriate for curing our misery.³²

It is worth noting that in some of the passages that we have quoted Calvin is using Augustine's language almost verbatim:

For what was so necessary for the building up of our hope, and for the freeing the minds of mortals cast down by the condition of mortality itself, from despair of immortality, than that it should be demonstrated to us at how great a price God rated us, and how greatly he loved us!³³

Second, this position cannot be regarded as 'voluntaristic' in the sense that this term tends to characterize the position of Duns Scotus, for example. This can be shown by the fact that Thomas Aquinas, who was most certainly not a voluntarist, in effect codified and developed the Augustinian position just noted. So though it would be too much to say that Calvin followed explicitly in the footsteps of Aquinas, there is nevertheless a sense in which his position can be said to exemplify Thomas's view regarding the fittingness of the atonement.

Thomas discusses the Incarnation in *Summa Theologiae* 3a 1–6, and among the questions he considers is 'Was the Incarnation necessary for the restoration of the human race?' Citing Augustine in support (*De Trin.* XIII.10), he says:

We refer to something as necessary for an end in two senses. First when the goal is simply unattainable without it, e.g. food for sustaining human life. Second, when it is required for a better and more expeditious attainment of the goal, e.g. a horse for a journey. In the first sense the Incarnation was not necessary for the restoration of human nature, since by his infinite power God had many other ways to accomplish this end. In the second sense, however, it was needed for the restoration of human nature.³⁴

Thomas proceeds to offer five ways in which atonement by Incarnation was better than some other alternative, and effective in delivering mankind from evil. So for Aquinas the Incarnation is not a triumph of the divine will over the divine intellect, a case of voluntarism, but a case of good reasons triumphing over less good reasons. Nor is it true that

³² *On the Trinity*, trans. A. W. Hadden (Edinburgh: Clark, 1873), XIII.10.

³³ *On the Trinity*, XIII.10; see also XIII.16.

³⁴ *Summa Theologiae*, trans. R. J. Hennessey, 3a 1 6.

Aquinas even thinks of atonement through satisfaction being necessary in our sense (2), since he gives such a view of the atonement as a reason for it being necessary in the third sense. Of course it is true that Aquinas is here discussing the Incarnation and not the atonement; nevertheless, he appears to be denying what Anselm (and Calvin in the *Institutes*) regards as a necessary condition of the necessity of the atonement, and so by implication denying the necessity of the actual atonement—though not, perhaps, denying the necessity of some atonement or other.

Returning to Calvin, how are we to understand these expressions that we have cited? It may be that what we have just learned from Aquinas gives us a clue. But I think we can rule out the idea that Calvin changed his mind on the question. For one thing, as we have seen Anselmianism is present in the last edition of the *Institutes*, of 1559. But maybe the *Institutes* testifies to some hardening of Calvin's position in the direction of Anselmianism, perhaps prompted by his correspondence with Laelius Socinus (as I argued in *John Calvin's Ideas*).³⁵ Yet the writings from which we have just quoted cannot easily be assigned to an 'earlier' or 'later' Calvin. For although the *Commentary on John's Gospel* was published in 1553, the *Sermons on Galatians* were delivered in 1557 and published in 1563, those on Isaiah 53 have a similar date, 1556, and the sermons on the *Harmony of the Gospels*, from which the quotation on Matthew 26 is taken, as we have seen, are the latest of all, being preached shortly before Calvin's death, well after the termination of his exchanges with the older Socinus in 1555. During these years, 1553–9, Calvin was preparing the definitive edition of the *Institutes*. The puzzle is increased by noting the fact that nowhere does he repudiate a view of the atonement that he once held, or hint at such a repudiation, nor does he record, in these quotations or elsewhere, any sense of dissonance between them and the view expressed in the *Institutes*. Nor again does the fact that the two views are expressed side by side in the same sermon appear to faze him.

Randall Zachman has plausibly argued that in his sermons Calvin was the pastor to the Genevans, and so it might be thought that perhaps Calvin has two presentations of the atonement for two distinct audiences. Whereas in the *Institutes* Calvin writes as a doctor of the Church, as a theologian for theologians and for would-be pastors, in the sermons he speaks as a pastor to the rank-and-file of Christians. But what of his commentaries? Zachman argues that in these too it is Calvin the doctor

³⁵ *John Calvin's Ideas*, 338–9.

who speaks as a theological re-educator.³⁶ So this way of offering some kind of harmonization between the two views does not seem very promising either.

Considering another line of evidence, Calvin uses ‘acceptance’ (often considered to be evidence of Scotist influences, and so of the influence of voluntarism) only occasionally. But does his use offer a clue to settling the question of his view of the atonement? It is not clear that it does. For example, in his discussion of justification he says:

Thus we simply interpret justification, as the acceptance with which God receives us into his favour as if we were righteous; and we say that this justification consists in the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ.³⁷

But it would be hard to use this as evidence for voluntarism. For as it occurs in the context of justification by faith through Christ’s merits it would be unwarranted to extend its reference to alternative modes of reconciliation. In other places Calvin seems to be using the idea of acceptance or approval without using the word, as here:

However highly works may be estimated, they have their whole value more from the approbation of God than from their own dignity. For who will presume to plume himself before God on the righteousness of works, unless insofar as he approves of them? Who will presume to demand of him a reward except insofar as he has promised it? It is owing entirely to the goodness of God that works are deemed worthy of the honour and reward of righteousness; and therefore their whole value consists in this, that by means of them we endeavour to manifest obedience to God.³⁸

This may be thought to have some relevance to our question, in that Calvin attributes to God the power to give value, or to give greater value, to works than they actually have. It might be argued, if God can (by his beneficence) give value or greater value to works, then he can by such beneficence give value to people, taking them (by an act of his sovereign will) from the place of condemnation to the place of justification. However, I think that this would be an illegitimate argument. In the context of the passage cited, Calvin is discussing the place of works in justification. Justification through the merits of Christ is already assumed in the argument, therefore what Calvin says about God’s beneficence must be regarded as subordinated to that, not as proposing the possibility of an

³⁶ *John Calvin as Teacher, Pastor and Theologian* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2006), 83.

³⁷ *Inst.* III.11.2. ³⁸ *Inst.* III.11.20.

alternative mode of atonement and justification—though, of course, the words are consistent with there being such an alternative mode.

Also there is evidence the other way, in the same context. Writing of the quieting of the conscience before God, Calvin says:

Conscience, when it beholds God, must either have sure peace with his justice, or be beset by the terrors of hell. We gain nothing, therefore, by discoursing of righteousness, unless we hold it to be a righteousness stable enough to support our souls before the tribunal of God. When the soul is able to appear intrepidly in the presence of God, and receive his sentence without dismay, then only let us know that we have found a righteousness that is not fictitious.³⁹

It appears from this that there is only one way of beholding God, by having regard to Christ's unmerited righteousness, in which the sinful conscience can be made bold before God. But a little later on we will further consider the significance of the sort of language Calvin uses here.

The principle question, however, is: Are these sentences consistent with the view expressed in the *Institutes* which we have interpreted as Anselmian? Is there a logical failure at the heart of Calvin's presentation? It is clear, at least, that the Puritan John Owen implies they were not consistent, for he alludes to the passage in the John's Gospel commentary, and elsewhere mentions Calvin by name as an exponent of the view that Owen is combatting, as if citing this one passage is decisive. He either does not know of the (possibly) countervailing passages in the *Institutes* and elsewhere, or he does not care to draw attention to them. That's a puzzle. Calvin would have been a valuable ally, but the price to be paid might be the concession that Calvin occasionally contradicts himself! We will look at Owen's own views shortly.

Maybe we need to consider the wording of the statements from the sermons and the commentary on John more carefully. The first two initially appear to be distinct from the third and fourth. The first two deal solely with pardon, and with the idea of pardon apart from Christ. The first says that such pardon would have been a great thing, the second says something rather different, that though mere pardon would have been a great thing we would have undervalued it, and so God gave us his only Son. The contrast in each case is either pardon without Christ or the prospect of something greater with and in Christ. The idea of mere pardon is that God might have remitted our sins by a declaration of clemency, pardon by amnesty. That could have happened by an act of the divine will—so Calvin may be suggesting—and that would have been a great

³⁹ *Inst.* III.13.3.

thing. But there is something greater, the situation in which God did not simply declare our pardon, but in which he came to us in the person of the Son to procure our pardon. In other words, there are greater blessings in the Son than the blessing of mere pardon, great though mere pardon would have been. There is a greater display of God's goodness and grace, and greater benefits for those who enjoy such grace.

So perhaps Calvin is making a distinction between pardon or 'mere pardon' on the one hand and the provision of righteousness on the other. This, I believe, brings us nearer to the most satisfactory solution to the apparent inconsistency, but it won't work as it stands. This is because Calvin, in the *Institutes* and no doubt elsewhere, habitually uses 'pardon' not as equivalent to 'the mere forgiveness of sins', but as a comprehensive word for reconciliation, embracing both forgiveness and the imputation of Christ's righteousness. For example, he argues:

In the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, he first terms it the imputation of righteousness, and hesitates not to place it in forgiveness of sins. . . . He declares, moreover, that a definition of it was given by David, when he pronounced him blessed who has obtained the free pardon of his sins. Whence it appears that this righteousness of which he speaks is simply opposed to judicial guilt.⁴⁰

However, we might legitimately push this line of argument a little further. Pardon by the declaration of God would have gained us pardon and acceptance. But most certainly, for Calvin, being 'in Christ' means much more than this. It means being adopted into God's family with all that that implies. And of course to be 'in Christ' logically requires the Incarnation and all that followed it. The question for Calvin is not whether there could have been alternative ways of 'atonement', considered in the abstract. Rather, an atonement that was mere pardon, even if 'pardon' is understood in a generous and rich way, would be inferior to atonement that involved the riches of union with Christ.

So Calvin is interested not only in the end of atonement—pardon, reconciliation—but also, and perhaps chiefly, in the means to that end. Unlike Anselm, he is not considering atonement or salvation in abstract terms. For him there are not two equivalent alternative means to one end, salvation, but alternative means with alternative ends. If we consider the end in optimal terms, in terms that maximize the love and grace of God to sinners by best displaying it, then for Calvin there is only one possible means to *that* end; namely, atonement by the Incarnate Logos and satisfaction by the God-man. On this view, these are logically necessary and

⁴⁰ *Inst.* III.11.4 (see also III.11.6: God justifies by pardoning).

jointly sufficient for procuring those maximal benefits which we in fact enjoy through his work. There may have been another way to pay the price of sin; or rather, *not* to pay the price of sin but to freely pardon it. But there was no other way of procuring those God-glorifying effects that evoke wonder and amazement at God's pardon.

Salvation by a word would have been a great thing. But salvation by union with the God-man in his death and resurrection is a greater thing. Indeed, for Calvin it is the greatest possible thing.

Is Calvin a voluntarist, then? Why would supposing that God could have saved us by a word make him a voluntarist? Supposing that 'saved' here refers to a means, and not merely to the end, is he making standards of right and wrong a matter of mere choice? That would certainly be voluntarist. Yet even at his most 'voluntarist' Calvin still reckons we need pardon, even if only 'by a word'. So necessarily sin requires pardon, for only by pardoning it can sin be 'negated'. But there are, as Calvin thinks, various possible modes of pardon. So God is not, by his will, deciding whether or not we need pardon, or what counts as pardon, but only decreeing which among the various modes of pardon is best, and he makes his choice not by a mere act of will, but for a reason. We must not confuse the mode of pardon with the ground of pardon. The mode of pardon may be 'by a word', but the ground of pardon may be 'because he loved us'. So what is necessary is that sin must be pardoned, not condoned or indulged or overlooked. Calvin does not subscribe therefore to the necessity of the atonement, but to the necessity of pardon. Does this make him a full-blooded voluntarist? Certainly not. But perhaps he is a voluntarist in a weaker sense: that there is another mode of pardon, or modes of pardon, that God can accept, apart from reconciliation by the God-man. Is this voluntarist? If he is, were not also Augustine and Aquinas (not the usual suspects) voluntarists? Hardly. Of course Calvin's 'voluntarism' may lay him open to the charge of Socinianism, but that's another story!

As regards the concrete and particular blessings to be found *in Christo*, they are certainly non-voluntarist, or at least they leave open the question of voluntarism. It may be a matter of divine will/deed that we are to enjoy those specific blessings, and not some lesser blessings, but we cannot enjoy the greatest of blessings without their coming to us in a manner which ensures them, and to achieve this requires Incarnation and atonement as Calvin understands these. It is as if Calvin, quite unlike Anselm, starts not with a relatively abstract view of the atonement, but with the concrete blessings of being in Christ, and then asks 'What does being in union with Christ in this sense require on the part of God?' The answer is clear. For Calvin it requires Incarnation, propitiatory death of the

incarnate Son rendering satisfaction to divine justice, resurrection, ascension, and session, along with the applicatory work of the Spirit bringing men and women to the position of being 'in Christ'. Only by presupposing all this are the distinctive Pauline blessings of union with Christ, which Calvin so notably emphasizes, ensured. We might say, in Anselmian vein, that for Calvin such an atonement was one than which no greater can be conceived. But Calvin's overall view, if we take it that the second view is consistent with the first, and not a logical error on his part, is located somewhere in the area of our (2) and (3). But where exactly? If the interpretation of his views provided above is on the right lines, and Calvin's views are taken to be consistent throughout the corpus of his writings, then the modalities that Calvin ascribes to the atonement in the *Institutes* must be understood as a case of (3a) (see below). It is not that the atonement is necessary given divine justice. As far as I can see Calvin never or seldom suggests this in the *Institutes*. It is rather that the atonement is necessary, or is required, if (and only if) God wants, in pardoning us, to show his great love for us.

So in terms of our earlier schema perhaps we should interpret Calvin's view of the 'necessity' of the atonement in the following way:

- (3a) Necessarily, if there is to be pardon, and if this pardon is to be optimally beneficial to those pardoned, then it will be by means of an atonement by the God-man.

That is, the modalities of the atonement are hypothetical or conditional necessities of a rather specific kind. Given that God's will is to optimally benefit us by the Incarnation and self-offering of the God-man, certain actions on the part of God, namely Incarnation and atonement, are necessary.

Perhaps a similar logical structure is to be found in Richard Swinburne's account of the atonement.⁴¹ According to Swinburne, redemption is not necessary in the Anselmian sense, but God has seen fit to offer redemption and with it a way of us making amends for our sin. 'A good God might provide for men the necessary reparation and penance whereby to make their atonement', and Christ by his sacrifice offers his life to God, an offer which we accept and ourselves offer as our reparation and penance. However, in fact we are not warranted in interpreting Swinburne's view as an instance of (3a), since he does not appear to claim that the view he outlines is the best possible but rather that it is an eminently suitable or

⁴¹ *Responsibility and Atonement* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), ch. 10.

fitting thing for God to have done. So perhaps, after all, Swinburne's is an example of our (3):

- (3) Given the fact of sin, if there is to be reconciliation, then possibly it will be via the God-man.

If (3a) is the true character of the logic of Calvin's views, then we must say this: Calvin briefly, but several times, countenances an alternative account of salvation. God could have saved us by a word. But he quickly moves on, impelled by what he understands to be the scriptural account of what actually happened. Though an atonement by fiat is possible, it would have been a great thing, but not the greatest thing. If the atonement is to be one that befits the majesty, goodness, and grace of God then it must be one undertaken and procured by the God-man. In this respect Calvin is clearly non-Anselmian. Anselm's view of the necessity of the atonement is located somewhere in the area of (1) and (2), depending upon tricky and contested nuances of interpretation about the place of the restoration of the race in relation to the atonement.

So on this interpretation overall Calvin's view of the atonement is not Anselmian. Yet he may still be Anselmian in the broader sense, for he may at this point be thinking in the manner of a perfect-being theologian. For Calvin there is a possible world in which pardon is procured by a word. But the actual world is one in which it is procured by Incarnation and atonement. Pressing the point a little, we might say more than this—that despite not being Anselmian to the letter, as we noted earlier, and as has become clearer as the discussion has proceeded, Calvin is Anselmian in spirit.

Returning to the opening discussion of the chapter, we can perhaps see how for Calvin what was 'best for us' (as he puts it at *Inst.* II.12.1) is not that we be pardoned and received back into the favour of God (great though this would be), but that we are pardoned through the person and work of the God-man. Pressing the Anselmian parallel a little further, we might say that Calvin thinks that that view of the atonement is most fitting which optimally benefits us and optimally honours God our Redeemer, as expressed in this double superlative: 'What was best for us our most merciful Father determined' (*Caeterum quod nobis optimum erat statuit clementissimus Pater*).⁴²

⁴² *Inst.* II.12.1.

This tension or oscillation in Calvin's thought is played out in a rather different way a century later in a debate about the atonement between several Calvinists: John Owen (1616–83), who was at the time Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford, William Twisse (1575–1646), recently Prolocutor of the Westminster Assembly, who had died some years before Owen wrote, and Samuel Rutherford (1610–61), then Professor of Divinity at the University of St Andrews. What sparked the controversy was the rise of Socinianism in England.

Owen was extremely concerned about this development. After producing the scholastic work in Latin *A Dissertation on Divine Justice* (1653), dedicated to Oliver Cromwell, at the command of Parliament he also wrote *Vindiciae Evangelicae* (1655). Both were directed against nascent Unitarianism in England in the person of John Biddle (1615–62). These writings obviously have a political dimension, though forming an estimate of that side of things falls beyond our scope.

Owen believed that what he took to be the orthodox view of the atonement, broadly the Anselmian view (understood in our sense (2)), was in danger of being undermined by theologians who should have known better, in particular two of his Puritan confrères, Twisse and Rutherford.⁴³ There is some irony in his stance, because it emerges that in expressing his disquiet he is also arguing against the very position he himself took in an earlier publication, *The Death of Death* (1647).⁴⁴ He clearly feels driven to go into print against those whom he regards as his fellow Calvinists, yet expresses some misgivings in doing so.⁴⁵ For, other than on this issue, he regarded himself as very much a theological ally of both Twisse and Rutherford, 'pious, worthy, and very learned divines'.⁴⁶ Further evidence for his regard for Twisse is the fact that he wrote a laudatory preface to a work of Twisse's on the divine decrees, *The Riches of God's Love*, posthumously published in 1653, the same year as the *Dissertation*. Why Owen should be so warm in his appreciation of this work is not clear, since as we will see it expresses the very view of divine sovereignty that he objected to in his *Dissertation*!

⁴³ *A Dissertation on Divine Justice* (1653), in *Works*, ed. Goold, x. 506.

⁴⁴ *Works*, x. 205.

⁴⁵ Those who hold the view which Owen disputes 'are so numerous and respectable, and men who have merited so highly of the church of God, that although the freeman of Christ, and taught to call no man on earth master in matters of religion, unless I had on my side not fewer and equally famous men, I should have a religious scruple publicly to differ from them' (*Diss.* 584).

⁴⁶ *Diss.* 506.

There is one immediately striking difference between Calvin and the approach to the atonement of Owen and the others. Their starting point is not the atonement itself, as it was with Calvin, but the doctrine of God. The approach is much more obviously scholastic in its method. The atonement features only secondarily, as illustrative of the attributes and powers of God, and of their exercise, issues which are logically prior to the consideration of the atonement. I will try to bring out this difference in what follows.

Owen's view in his *Dissertation on Divine Justice* is that atonement is necessary (in our sense (2)) because justice is essential to God, the pardon of sin requires the satisfaction of divine justice, and only atonement by God himself (in the person of the incarnate Logos) could be sufficient. There is no possible world in which there is sin and pardon for sin and yet no atonement in satisfaction of divine justice. By 1653 Owen finds it amazing that an orthodox theologian might suppose that God could have saved us by a word.

For Owen 'vindicatory justice' (not to be confused with vindictive justice) is an exercise of 'the universal and essential rectitude of the divine nature'.⁴⁷ Justice is not a separate attribute of God, much less are there attributes of different kinds of justice. God's acting justly is one exercise of the one divine nature, a particular exercise which the character of certain contingent circumstances calls forth. Owen objects to the distinction between commutative justice, justice as a reward or punishment, and distributive justice, the justice that God exercises as Creator and (for Twisse) as Redeemer.

In modern ethics distributive justice concerns the giving to each person of his or her due, and the study of justice concerns what material principles are involved in treating equals equally. On the other hand, commutative justice is usually subsumed under theories of punishment. The distinction itself is from Aristotle. But in Twisse's view, at least (and of course he speaks for a broad tradition of theistic thinking), God has no obligation to treat all his human creatures equally, since he is not under moral obligation to them as is, say, a human father to his children or an employer to his workforce. This is shown, *inter alia*, in the fact that God is the author of life and death. So in God's case distributive justice has to do with the way in which he relates to creatures who have no rights in respect to himself, and to whom he has no obligations. To suppose that God has obligations would be to place him under law and so to diminish his

⁴⁷ *Diss.* 505.

sovereignty. There is a strongly procedural element to God's distributive justice, therefore. For example, God has no obligation to make promises. But his justice requires that if he makes promises then he keeps them. Other than that, as we will see, for the Creator distributive justice is little more than an aspect of wisdom, the matching of suitable means to various ends.

For Owen, by contrast, there is no substantive distinction between the two kinds of justice. Distributive justice 'in no wise differs from universal justice, unless in respect of its relation to another being'. It is an aspect of 'God's dominion and supreme right'. The justice which justifies divine punishment of the 'crimes of rational beings, to whom a law hath been given, according to the rule of his right,—is the vindicatory justice of which we are treating'.⁴⁸ So although God is not under law, he is under an obligation to himself to uphold and vindicate his own righteous nature. Although Owen refers to the perfection of the divine being, the assertion of this divine justice is not the result of a piece of a priori reasoning in the Anselmian manner (though Owen is not averse to arguing occasionally in the manner of a perfect-being theologian), but it is for Owen based upon scriptural revelation.

Since such 'universal justice' is an essential attribute of the divine nature, it follows, for Owen, that given sin God must necessarily exercise his justice, 'because it supposes in him a constant and immutable will to punish sin, so that while he acts consistently with his nature he cannot do otherwise than punish and avenge it'.⁴⁹ Divine justice is not like divine mercy, which is also an essential attribute of God, for mercy is exercised through a 'free act of the divine will, which he may exercise at pleasure'. So although justice and mercy are each essential attributes of God, their mode of operation is also essentially different: justice is inexorable; mercy is discretionary.

In a short excursus in his vast scholastic work *Vindiciae Gratiae*⁵⁰ Twisse makes a principled distinction between God's essential nature and his will in respect of his vindicatory or commutative justice. The excursus is a sustained defence of the sovereign will of God against a range of Reformed theologians—Piscator, Lubbertus, Sibranus, Vorstius—who thought along Owenian lines. He makes good use of the absolute power—ordained power distinction, but not to install a God of pure will. His point is that God by his absolute power might suspend punishment, or waive it. For as

⁴⁸ *Diss.* 504 5.

⁴⁹ *Diss.* 505.

⁵⁰ *Vindiciae Gratia, Potestaetis, Ac Providentiae Dei* (Amsterdam, 1632), 204. There is a good general discussion of the encounter between Owen and Twisse in Carl R. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 104 7.

he is a God of justice, so he is a God of mercy.⁵¹ The crucial distinction that he makes, perhaps, is that though God is displeased with every sin, it does not follow that he must punish every sin.⁵² God does not act through natural necessity. Sin necessarily displeases God, but God does not necessarily punish what displeases him.⁵³ For in order to punish, God must have decreed to punish, and his decreeing whether to punish sin in order to pardon it, or to pardon it by an act of clemency, is a free act of his will and not (as for the later Owen) a necessary expression of his just nature. So for Twisse there is a contingent connection between God's being displeased at sin and his punishing sin. Divine punishment is no more inexorable than is divine mercy.

This view is endorsed in his posthumously published *The Riches of God's Love*,⁵⁴ to which we will also refer. Because of God's liberty with respect to punishment, there is a possible world in which God pardons sin without atonement. Since this is intended as a perfectly general point about the nature of God, it follows, in a parallel way, that though God is just, and obedience pleases him, nevertheless he may choose not to reward it. When evil occurs, although God necessarily hates evil, he may choose not to punish it.

So it appears that Twisse has a stronger and more symmetrical view of divine sovereignty, and therefore of divine discretion, than does Owen, though it may be no stronger than Calvin's. It is rooted in his account of the Creator-creature distinction. He argues like this. As Creator, God possesses moral attributes such as justice necessarily; the creatures have the corresponding attributes accidentally. Further, rational creatures have an obligation to the law of God, an obligation which arises not because the commandments are just when judged by some independent standard of justice, but because God, the Creator, requires obedience to them from his creatures. But God does not in the same way issue commands to himself.

⁵¹ *Vindiciae Gratia*, 204 (Twisse cites Exod. 34: 7).

⁵² 'Respondeo hac unica vice, & respondendo concludo, necesse esse ut Deus oderit peccatum, hoc est, ut peccatum ipsi displiceat; non necesse esse absolute, ut peccatum puniat, nedum ipsum peccatorem. Item Deum indifferentem esse, ad peccatum puniendum, & non puniendum, ratione naturae, non indifferentem esse ratione constitutionis. Interea non ita indifferentem esse an puniendum aut non puniendum, quaemadmodum ad pluendum aut non pluendum. Nam horam unam non magis illustrat bonitatem divinam, quam alterum' (*Vindiciae*, 204). The language of indifference here suggests the influence of Scotus, to whom at certain points Twisse does indeed appeal.

⁵³ *Diss.* 551.

⁵⁴ William Twisse, *The Riches of God's Love Unto the Vessells of Mercy, Consistent with His Absolute Hatred or Reprobation of the Vessells of Wrath* (Oxford, 1653).

That would be to invert the Creator–creature distinction. God is not under any moral obligation to himself, but is warranted in acting freely, though not unjustly, to others:⁵⁵

If justice humane be of the same nature with justice Divine, it followeth, not only that, that which is just in man is just with God, but that it must be after the same manner just; that like as men's justice consisteth in obedience to God's law, implying subjection thereunto: So justice Divine must consist in obedience to Gods law implying subjection. And like as man is obliged to be just, In the same manner God is obliged to be just. And consequently like as *Saul* sinned and became unjust in slaying the Lord's Priests, so had God been unjust in doing the like.⁵⁶

As the Creator, God has a range of powers and opportunities which it would be immoral for a creature to have; to create life, and to end life, for example:

In making the world, I doe not doubt, but God did that which was just; but was there any justice in God obliging him to the making of the world? . . . It is most true that supposing the end which God intends, the wisdom of God directs in the right use of congruous means; and no other justice then this his wisdom doth Aquinas acknowledge in the divine nature.⁵⁷

Peter Geach puts what seem to be the essentials of Twisse's view (though not with Twisse in mind, of course) as follows:

God has nothing to gain from creating things, or from our praise or him; God's will is the reason why things other than God are, and itself has no reason. I am not denying that God's will is for the good, or affirming that God has set up some arbitrary standard of goodness; but the Divine Nature stands in no need of any good to be got from creation.⁵⁸

In this both Twisse and Geach seem to follow Scotus, for, according to Richard Cross, Scotus argued in the following way:

Basically, Scotus believes that whatever God wills for creatures, with the exception of commands and prohibitions that have God as their object, is just or right in virtue of being willed by God. God is a sufficient source of moral goodness by commanding and prohibiting . . . If, prior to any act of his will, there were any obligations placed on God (if God has 'practical knowledge') with regard to the actions he directs towards creatures, then either God would be bound to will

⁵⁵ *Riches*, ii. 112 (see also ii. 153, ii. 34).

⁵⁶ *Riches*, i. 125.

⁵⁷ *Riches*, ii. 152.

⁵⁸ *Providence and Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 36.

them, or he would not be so bound. In the first case God would fail to be free with regard to his creature-directed actions. And this would make his actions dependent on the natures of creatures; which in turn would mean that God failed to be wholly unconditioned—such that he could not be affected by anything external to him . . . but just as (for the medievals) it is impossible for God to be affected by anything external to himself, so it is impossible for him to act badly.⁵⁹

For some reason Cross restricts his consideration of Scotus's view on divine power to what God can command, but, as Twisse implies, such a view applies equally to what God can decree for his creatures:

It is impossible he should abuse his sovereignty; yea his mercy and justice are one and the same reality with his power: what a vanity then is it to discourse as this Author [Twisse's opponent Hord] doth, in preferring one attribute of God before another, as if God were more glorious in the one than in the other.⁶⁰

Twisse applies this principle by using the following hermeneutical rule: Whatever Scripture says that God wills must be just. So all that God does and permits is 'codecent', it is in accordance with divine justice.⁶¹

There is an interesting point of comparison here with views more recently expressed by Thomas Morris. He begins his article 'Duty and Divine Goodness' as follows:

Throughout the history of Western theology, divine goodness has been explicated in a number of different ways. Central among these is the important religious claim that God is morally good. This form of divine goodness usually is thought to consist in God's acting always in accordance with universal moral principles, satisfying without fail moral duties and engaging in acts of gracious supererogation. Divine moral goodness is understood basically on the model of human moral goodness.⁶²

Morris proceeds to argue against this view, on the grounds that it is incompatible with divine praiseworthiness. He argues that God acts in accordance with principles that are duties for us, but not for him. Twisse (like Rutherford), among others such as Scotus and Aquinas, sharply dissents from the idea that God always acts in accordance with universal moral principles, and would in all likelihood dissent from the Morrisian analogical variant of it as well, that God's goodness consists in his acting in perfect accord with those principles which would provide duties for a

⁵⁹ *Duns Scotus on God* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 88.

⁶⁰ *Riches*, i. 124.

⁶¹ *Riches*, ii. 152.

⁶² 'Duty and Divine Goodness', in *The Concept of God*, ed. Morris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 107; see also 116–21.

lesser being. For they might well hold that while we have duties to be just, God cannot have an analogical variant of such a duty. As the Creator he has discretionary powers which we necessarily do not have.

Perhaps we may also see here the influence on Twisse of the Scotist view that God has the power at the same eternal ‘moment’ of freely doing A or freely doing not-A. At one point in *Vindiciae Gratiae* Twisse quotes Scotus approvingly: ‘The divine will is not so inclined towards any secondary object by any thing in itself that can oppose its being justly inclined towards its opposite in the same manner, as without contradiction it may will its opposite.’⁶³ This may be an appeal to what is currently called Scotus’s synchronically contingent view of divine freedom, which amounts to the claim that given that God eternally wills the occurrence of A at time t_1 he could (everything else being exactly the same) have willed the occurrence of not-A at t_1 instead. However, there is no reference to time or to its absence in the passage from Scotus which Twisse quotes, though he certainly follows Scotus in reckoning that God has such sovereign power with respect to a ‘secondary object’—that is, to an object other than God himself.

Twisse takes such an overall position about the nature of God’s justice to imply that while as a matter of fact God eternally wills pardon for sin through the atonement for human sins by the cross of Christ he could, *ceteris paribus*, eternally will some alternative arrangement—for example, pardoning sin by a mere word. Each alternative is equally in line with God’s justice and with his other perfections. In Twisse’s opinion such a view is more in accord with divine freedom and sovereignty than an Anselm-type view, which (he holds) compromises the Creator–creature distinction by placing God under obligations. So free forgiveness is based upon the divine sovereignty, but would not be inconsistent with sovereignly administered divine (distributive) justice.

Although Twisse appeals to the position of Scotus, the significance of this must not be exaggerated, since in the *Riches* he also appeals to Thomas:

⁶³ Cited by Owen at *Diss.* 588. A. Vos holds that this Scotist position is characteristic of Reformed theologians of the seventeenth century (see his ‘Scholasticism and Reformation’). See also A. J. Beck ‘Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676): Basic Features of His Doctrine of God’. (Both are in W. J. van Asselt and E. Dekker (eds.), *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2001).) To my mind these claims are somewhat exaggerated. For further discussion on this point see Paul Helm, ‘Synchronic Contingency in Reformed Scholasticism’ and ‘Synchronic Contingency Again’, *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift*, 57 (1993), 207–22, 234–8.

For as *Aquinas* hath delivered; God's wisdom is his justice. For he is a debtor to none but to himselfe, and how to himselfe? Not otherwise then in all things which he doth, to carry himselfe so as it becometh himselfe; that is to order everything to a right end, which is only the manifestation of his own glory.⁶⁴

There is a marginal reference to *Aquinas* in *Riches* (ii. 112)—to the will of God, *Summa Theologiae*, art 23. 6—but this looks to be an error. The reference to *Aquinas* is likely to be to *Summa Theologiae*, Ia 21, 'Justice and Mercy in God'. Here Thomas makes the distinction between commutative and distributive justice—there is no question of God being commutatively just, citing Romans 11: 35. God is not a member of an earthly society, not even in a stretched or analogous sense. 'Aristotle reckons it silly to praise God for sound citizenship.' By contrast his distributive justice is seen in the good order of the universe. 'It is the creature's due to have what is ordained for it.'⁶⁵

This is not a God of pure will, therefore, since he has a nature, he is essentially just.⁶⁶ Rather, it is that at the moment of his decree, since he has no obligations, certainly no obligations to the nature of justice, God has complete discretion over how he will decree to exercise his goodness in respect of his creation. Given that he decrees the forgiveness of sin, he has discretion over the mode by which that forgiveness is procured.

Whether the source is, in effect, Scotus or Thomas,⁶⁷ Owen is not impressed:

⁶⁴ *Riches*, ii. 112. See also i. 152: 'In making the world, I doe not doubt, but God did that which was just; but was there any justice in God obliging him to the making of the world?... It is most true that supposing the end which God intends, the wisdom of God directs in the right use of congruent means; and no other justice then this his wisdom doth *Aquinas* acknowledge in the divine nature.'

⁶⁵ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia 21.1, trans. Thomas Gilby (Garden City, N.Y.: Image, 1969). For a modern defence of such a position see Brian Davies, 'The Problem of Evil', in Davies (ed.), *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide to the Subject* (London: Cassell, 1998).

⁶⁶ One potential source of confusion in this debate is the use of *potentia absoluta* not to characterize a God of pure will, but what God could do freely, considered apart from what he does in furtherance of his decree. 'I love not to dispute here, but God, if we speak of his absolute power, without respect to his free decree, could have pardoned sin without a ransom, and gifted all mankind and fallen angels with heaven, without any satisfaction of either the sinner, or his surety; for he neither punisheth sin, nor tenders heaven to men or angels by necessity of nature, as the fire casteth out heat, and the sun light; but freely' (Samuel Rutherford, *Christ Dying, and Drawing Sinners Unto Himself* (1647; Glasgow, 1803), 8 9).

⁶⁷ Twisse's use of various scholastics accords with Richard Muller's claim that such sources were often used eclectically by seventeenth century Reformed theologians (e.g. 'Scholasticism and Orthodoxy in the Reformed Tradition' and 'Ad fontes argumentorum', in *After Calvin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003)).

We maintain that God from his nature cannot do this, and, therefore, that he cannot either by his power or his justice; and as our learned antagonist produces no argument to prove that God can do it without resistance from his justice, but what flows from this false supposition, that he can do it by his power, it is not necessary to give ourselves any trouble on this head.⁶⁸

Owen implies that God's will to pardon without atonement would be 'resisted' by his justice. Twisse would demur, because he does not recognize that God has a *prima facie* duty to act justly in this sense and, as we have already seen, a strong doctrine of divine simplicity. While, says Owen, God is free to speak or not to speak, nevertheless if he speaks then he must speak truly. In a parallel way, he is free to redeem or not to redeem, but if he redeems then it must be in a fashion consistent with his justice:

It is necessary that God should speak truly, but he doth not speak from an absolute necessity; but it being supposed that he wills to speak, it is impossible that he should not speak truly. We say, therefore, that God cannot but punish sin, or that he necessarily punishes sin; not, however, from an absolute necessity of nature, as the Father begets the Son, but upon the suppositions before mentioned,—by a necessity which excludes an antecedent indifference but not a concomitant liberty in the agent, for in punishing sin he acts by volition and with understanding.⁶⁹

In his controversy over Socinianism Owen was troubled by the thought that here extremes meet, in that in his view the Socinians' anthropomorphic conception of God, who can forgive us without atonement, and Twisse's transcendent God entail that the atonement is not necessary in our sense (2). However, if the label 'voluntarism' is appropriate for Twisse's view, it is voluntarism of a mild kind. To use an analogy, it is rather like the right that a monarch or president may have to grant a free pardon to someone guilty of a crime, or the right that the police exercise when they declare an amnesty.

One way of expressing their difference of opinion is by reference to divine freedom. Owen's view of divine freedom is more complex than Twisse's. God is free, and his actions are free and yet necessary, though not naturally necessary.⁷⁰ By this he means that the exercise of God's justice is not like the heat of the flame that follows the striking of a match, even though it is necessary in another sense; namely, that he must act in accordance with his nature. God is free in the sense that he could create or not, and he is free as regards the exercise of mercy. But he is only free in

⁶⁸ *Diss.* 588.

⁶⁹ *Diss.* 589.

⁷⁰ *Diss.* 511.

the exercise of his justice in the sense that he is not externally constrained to exercise it. By contrast mercy is not necessary in either sense. Yet even in the exercise of his mercy to sinners God must act consistently with his justice; that is, by means of an atonement on their behalf. Since God is perfectly just, all his actions must be just:

Let it be observed that the nature of mercy and justice are different in respect of their exercise: for between the act of mercy and its object no natural obligation intervenes; for God is not bound to any one to exercise any act of mercy, neither is he bound to reward obedience, for this is a debt due from his natural right, and from the moral dependence of the rational creature, and indispensably thence arising . . . these necessary egresses [of divine justice] are the consequence, not of an absolute but of a conditional necessity,—namely, a rational creature and its sin being supposed, and both existing freely in respect of God, but the necessary suppositions being made [regarding the divine attributes], the exercise of other perfections is also necessary.⁷¹

Twisse's view of divine freedom is simpler. God has discretion as to how to act, and the only inkling we have over the limits of such discretion is what Scripture tells us that God in fact does. Of course, when he has decreed X, then X must follow, and in all such actions he is just, consistent, and reliable.

'Naturally' and 'nature' are another potential source of confusion in understanding these issues. For Owen, God is 'naturally' just, justice is part of his nature, but nevertheless God's justice is not exercised naturally, that is as fire burns paper, but is an expression of God's will. So it is free, in Owen's view, since the will of God is intrinsically free, though apparently lacking freedom in the Scotist sense. That is, God is not constrained to exercise justice, since it is part of his nature. In exercising justice God is simply being himself. So God exercises justices freely; that is, by his will, unconstrainedly. Yet in a separate sense of 'free' God freely decrees whatever extrinsically to himself is brought to pass by that decree.⁷² God's decrees are free in the sense that they could have been other than they are, though all possible decrees are consistent with God's own nature. But having freely (and consistently with his own nature) decreed some state of affairs A, then A must immutably follow, for God is immutable. God is free in respect of the bringing to pass of extrinsic states of affairs, but not similarly free with respect to the exercise of his own nature.

The difference over divine freedom may be put in this way. For Twisse, the exercise of God's nature in matters external to himself is necessarily

⁷¹ *Diss.* 511 12.

⁷² *Diss.* 596.

subordinate to his decree. This is because of his prerogatives as Creator. Although he is necessarily displeased by sin, nevertheless he may decree to pardon sin by a word, or by an atonement. For the later Owen, God's decree is logically subordinate to his nature. So it is up to God whether or not he pardons sin, for his mercy is discretionary, but if he wills to pardon sin this must be in a way consistent with his justice. Hence, in this subordinate, conditional sense, the atonement is necessary.

In the exercise of that justice, although, if it were not to be exercised, according to our former hypothesis, God would cease from his right and dominion, and so would not be God, still he is a free and also an absolutely necessary agent; for he acts from will and understanding, and not from an impetus of nature only, as fire burns. And he freely willed that state and condition of things; which being supposed, that justice must necessarily be exercised.⁷³

So the difference between Owen and Twisse arises from a consideration not of the atonement, nor even of God's relation to justice, but of the scope of God's freedom. Twisse, following Scotus (as we have seen), supposes that God possesses freedom of indifference not only in matters external to himself, but even in the exercise of his own will. Following Aquinas, God possesses freedom in exercising his own prerogatives as Creator. Owen is astonished by this,⁷⁴ denying that 'supposing a sinful creature, the will of God can be indifferent (by virtue of the punitive justice inherent in it) to inflict or not inflict punishment upon that creature, or to the volition of punishment or its opposite'.⁷⁵

At least, that's how it seems until, towards the end of the *Dissertation*, writing in defence of the Reformed theologian Johannes Piscator (1546–1625), Owen seems to get himself into something of a tangle. Certainly he makes his account of divine freedom even more complex than we have already noted. Rather surprisingly he offers some comments which might ameliorate his position but which may in fact be inconsistent with it:

It is necessary, sin being supposed to exist, that he [God] should inflict punishment,—not the greatest that he is able to inflict, but as great as his right and justice require; for in inflicting punishment, he proceeds freely, according to the rule of these. It is necessary that the glory of the divine holiness, purity, and dominion should be vindicated; but in *what manner*, at *what time*, in *what degree*, or by *what kind of punishment*, belongs entirely to God, and we are not of his counsels.⁷⁶

⁷³ *Diss.* 511. ⁷⁴ *Diss.* 507.

⁷⁵ *Diss.* 509 10. The view he is astonished by is identical with his own earlier view as expressed in *The Death of Death*.

⁷⁶ *Diss.* 604 5 (italics in the original translation).

So because the justice of God is executed in accordance with his wisdom, Owen allows that God is free to vary the 'degrees, modes, duration, and extension of punishment, according to the degrees of the demerit or circumstances of the sin, or even to transfer it upon the surety, who has voluntarily, and with his own approbation, substituted himself in the room of sinners'.⁷⁷ Owen argues that a punishment is determined by its end, the vindication of justice, and provided that end is met then the means to that end may vary.⁷⁸ So God has discretion over mercy, no discretion over justice, yet he has discretion over the degree and mode of punishment which his justice requires.

Here Owen appears to waver somewhat on the central issue of divine freedom. He allows that punishments may vary provided that the end of satisfying justice is met. But this surely implies that there may be another mode of satisfaction for sin than atonement by the God-man. For in the quotation just given he allows that the manner, time, and nature of punishment belong entirely to God. This raises the question: If punishments in general, in respect of their manner and nature, are at God's discretion, why may the punishment for sin not similarly belong to God, even if we may not have a clue about what an alternative mode of punishment may be in this case?

If so, then the atonement by Christ is not necessary for pardon. For there may be, for all we know, a possible world in which God ordains a mode of satisfaction that is a punishment of a different kind from the one he has in fact ordained in the priestly work of Christ. And if this possibility is open to him, then God must after all possess something that approaches the freedom of indifference which Owen criticizes Twisse for attributing to him.

CALVIN AND THE PURITANS

There is an obvious methodological difference between Calvin and the participants in this Puritan debate. By the mid-seventeenth century more of the subtleties of scholasticism had become a part of Reformed dogmatics than in Calvin's day. The intellectual machinery had become more nuanced and complex. There is also, in the case of this particular discussion, a difference of method, a willingness (also characteristic of scholasticism) to discuss the doctrine of God in abstraction from what God has in fact done: to raise hypothetical possibilities. The understanding of what God does is conditioned, naturally enough, by what it is believed that God can do, and

⁷⁷ *Diss.* 605.

⁷⁸ *Diss.* 614.

what God can do is first debated and settled. Sometimes it is settled a priori, sometimes by reference to Scripture's account of what God does and may do, as with Twisse. The development of Reformed Orthodoxy in this direction is now well documented and discussed.⁷⁹ Despite this emphasis upon the doctrine of God, it is obviously false to suppose, as has been alleged, that in the decretal theology of theologians such as Owen and Twisse everything is deducible from the nature of God and his will; nevertheless, it is true that the understanding of the will of God *conditions* the character of what is decreed. By comparison, although Calvin had a strong doctrine of divine sovereignty, his approach was much more de facto and less nuanced, and much more focused on soteriology. The atonement has occurred. Perhaps it was necessary, perhaps not. But the atonement is a marvellous expression of divine love and mercy, perhaps the best possible one.

Owen undoubtedly speaks for what was by then the dominant Reformed position. What is striking about it is that it is highly juridical. What dominates the discussion is the inexorable justice of God and how the atonement squares with that, or rather has to square with that. The focus on the atonement as the expression of the love and mercy of God is secondary. God may be love, but God is certainly justice, and the atonement is primarily an act of divine justice making mercy possible—whereas with Calvin the atonement is an act of divine mercy that is consistent with justice.

Carl Trueman refers to Owen's view of the atonement as Christocentric,⁸⁰ and no doubt it is, certainly by comparison with Twisse's view. But there is a sense in which Calvin's view is even more so. For, as we have seen, for Calvin there is only one possible way for God to optimally express his love, namely atonement by Incarnation of the Logos; that is, satisfaction by his substitution for sinners. For these acts of divine condescension are in his view logically necessary and sufficient for procuring those precise, optimally rich benefits which Christians enjoy. The precisely specifiable, optimal blessings of union with Christ can only come to us in a manner which ensures them. This demands Incarnation and atonement of a broadly Anselmian kind. Unlike Anselm before him (and Owen and Twisse after him) Calvin starts not with a relatively abstract view of reconciliation, but with the concrete blessings of being in Christ, and then asks: What does being in union with Christ in this sense require on the part of God? Not salvation in some abstract sense, but resurrection, ascension, and session, along with the applicatory work of the Spirit bringing men and women to the position of

⁷⁹ Muller, *After Calvin*.

⁸⁰ 'John Owen's *Dissertation on Divine Justice: An Exercise in Christocentric Scholasticism*', *Calvin Theological Journal*, 33 (1998), 87–103.

being 'in Christ'. Only by presupposing all this can the distinctive Pauline blessings of union with Christ be ensured. That, at least, is Calvin's view.

While on several occasions, en passant, Calvin expresses the view that an alternative outcome could have been decreed with good reason by God, he quickly moves on, impelled by his concrete understanding of the blessings of being *in Christo*. It is as if, in this context at least, he has no taste for discussing divine sovereignty in itself. Though pardon by fiat is abstractly possible, the reconciliation that would ensue would, by comparison with the one that actually came about, have been salvation in black and white. The reconciliation that befits the majesty, goodness, and grace of God benefits us in a way than which no greater can be conceived; it is salvation in glorious technicolour. The reason that he provides for moving on from mere pardon to pardon by the atonement of Christ is not the requirement of divine justice that is characteristic of Owen's view: that justice demands satisfaction. The divine justice is not central to his argument, but the divine love. God sent his Son not because his justice required it, but because he loved us with unsurpassable depth and so wished to lavish on us an optimal expression of his mercy.

In making the justice of God so dominant Owen believed that he was on secure ground against the Socinians, securer than that occupied by Twisse and Rutherford. Perhaps he was. But he failed to reckon with the implied anti-Socinianism of Calvin. To take up Calvin's way of thinking about the atonement, which surely it was possible for Twisse and Owen to have done, would have conceded a logical point to Socinianism—that God could have saved us by a word—but they would then have occupied territory that it was impossible for Socinianism to enter, the Christologically rich territory of union with Christ and its benefits. Of course, Twisse and Owen did not deny the fact of union with Christ; but union with Christ was not and could not be central for them in the way in which it was for Calvin. We will uncover some of the reasons for this in the next chapter.

Duplex Gratia

WE concluded the last chapter noting Calvin's appreciation of the idea of union with Christ. It is the central idea of his teaching on Christ's 'double grace', which is in turn the key to the way he believes justification and sanctification are related. In this chapter we will first consider Calvin's understanding of the idea of justification, 'the principal ground on which religion must be supported'.¹ Then we will look at Calvin's view of the connection between justification and sanctification.

Calvin's estimation of the importance of justification reveals that he was heir to Luther, and stood with him and the other Reformers in his commitment to the forensic nature of justification and the centrality of the imputation of Christ's righteousness. This is also seen by the pointed way in which he claims the propriety and importance of the expression 'justification by faith alone':

The reader now perceives with what fairness the sophists of the present day cavil at our doctrine, when we say that a man is justified by faith alone (Rom.4.2). They dare not deny that he is justified by faith, seeing Scripture so often declares it; but as the word alone is nowhere expressly used, they will not tolerate its being added. Is it so? What answer, then, will they give to the words of Paul, when he contends that righteousness is not of faith unless it be gratuitous? How can it be gratuitous, and yet by works? . . . Does he not plainly enough attribute everything to faith alone when he disconnects it with works?²

Even though, as he reckons, 'by faith alone' are not the very words of Scripture, nevertheless the addition of 'alone' is warranted by the sense of Scripture.

But there is an initial puzzle about Calvin's treatment of justification. For although he is at one with the other magisterial Reformers on the forensic character of justification, and hence with their stress on *sola fide*, and regards this point as of central importance, he is strangely uncritical in his estimate of Augustine's view of justification, a view which, it is reasonable to think, helped to father the medieval abuses to which he so vehemently objects.

¹ *Inst.* III.11.1; cf. III.2.16.

² *Inst.* III.11.19.

For Calvin takes Augustine's understanding of *justificare* to connote not a forensic change of status, a declaring of the sinful to be pardoned and righteous in virtue of Christ's atonement, say, but as including a subjective change, a change of inner states due to the imparting of divine grace to the soul. This is how, he thinks, Augustine interpreted that verb and its cognates as it stood in his Old Latin Bible. And of course that understanding of *justificare* lies at the fountain-head of the medieval understanding of justification which, in the Reformers' eyes, led directly to, even if it did not formally entail, the radical misunderstanding of God's grace in Christ and then to the abuses which that misunderstanding made possible. Justification came to involve the need continuously to acquire merit by personal actions, even if those actions included buying it. So why was Calvin so sparing of Augustine, while being so hot against the late medieval views which, theologically speaking, depended on Augustine? To try to answer that question we will shortly revisit Augustine, consider what Calvin has to say about him, and compare this with Calvin's attitude to the 'sophists' of the medieval period.

Although Calvin adheres to *sola fide*, this is not how he habitually regards justification, as alone. Justification is by faith alone, but justification itself is not alone. By what, I believe, is a stroke of genius, he views justification not as a single, separate, divine gift, but as one of twin gifts, a point that he repeatedly stresses in the *Institutes* and which forms an axis of his soteriology. The other gift which accompanies justification is precisely what Augustine understood as intrinsic to justification: subjective moral renewal, sanctification. This coupling of justification and sanctification, and not their merging, and in particular the manner of this coupling, is not all there is to Calvin's view. The further crucial step is that he thinks of the two together, this set of twins, as the gift of Christ to his people, the fruit of their union, a union not, in its most fundamental sense, effected by the double gift, but resulting in it and enjoyed through it. So the integration goes further than simply establishing a close relationship between justification and sanctification. By this further step it is integrated into the work of Christ, for the double gift is the personal gift of Christ to his people. It is the critical moment at which, for Calvin, the *historia salutis* meets the *ordo salutis*. They meet at the point where the crucified, risen, and ascended Christ gives this double grace to people who were chosen 'in him' from eternity.³ We will attempt to outline Calvin's

³ However, it would be going too far to claim that this idea of a double gift is Calvin's invention. In his *Union With Christ: John Calvin and the Mysticism of St. Bernard* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1994) D. E. Tamburello notes that in his sermons on the Song of Songs Bernard, one of Calvin's major sources, uses the language of two graces: 'For these various reasons I must confess

view and its distinctiveness, and particularly its logical features. Had these features been observed, then the tortuous discussions of the relation between justification and sanctification which have been a feature of the Reformed tradition down to the present day might have been eased, if not avoided.

The unique and (for Calvin) the characteristic place that union with Christ plays was lost or (to be kinder) became muted in later Reformed Orthodoxy. So while the Reformed Orthodox discussed justification by faith alone with some sophistication, as we will see, the *locus* treatment of doctrine which became prevalent after Calvin tended to lose Calvin's synoptic view: the double grace, the fruit of union with Christ. As an example of this, we will look at the way in which one successor of Calvin at Geneva, Francis Turretin, treats and defends the idea of justification by faith alone. Finally, we will see how Calvin's view continues to be misunderstood, by considering John Hare's treatment of it in the context of discussing what he calls the 'moral gap'.

AUGUSTINE ON JUSTIFICATION

Augustine found his own views about sin and grace developing under the pressure of the Pelagian controversy. But they were not first formulated there. In his letter to Simplicianus, written around 396, he states without having to contest the point:

We are admonished [that is, by Scripture] that no one ought to glory or exult in his works of mercy as if he [Jacob] had propitiated God by meritorious works of his own. God gave him the power to be merciful when he showed compassion on whom he would show compassion. If anyone boasts that he has merited compassion by his faith, let him know that God gave him faith. God shows compassion by inspiring faith in one on whom he had compassion in giving to one who was still an unbeliever a share in his calling.⁴

that I am not entirely satisfied with the first grace by which I am enabled to repent of my sins, I must have the second as well, and so bear fruits that befit repentance, that I may not return like the dog to its vomit' (48).

⁴ *To Simplician on Various Questions: Book I*, trans. John H. S. Burleigh, in *Augustine: Earlier Writings* (London: SCM, 1953), 392–3. Alister McGrath claims that Augustine had a change of mind regarding justification prior to his letter to Simplicianus, as he himself tells us in his *Retractions*, I.23.1–4 and in *On the Predestination of the Saints*, 8 (McGrath, *Justitia Dei*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 24). But these sources record a change of view about the relation of faith to grace: about whether faith itself is a result of God's grace, or simply a means to acquire grace. While this concerns the relation of faith to justification, it does not affect Augustine's view of the concept of justification itself, particularly the issue of whether justification is purely forensic or

In the Pelagian controversy Augustine was forced to state with greater precision what grace was and was not, and he discovered scriptural support for his views; but his views there were not novel. However, there was no parallel controversy about justification. Furthermore, the relation between guilt, justification, and the work of Christ was not explored in the intense, self-conscious way that it came to be treated during the Reformation and subsequently. So it would be anachronistic to look for, and to expect to find, a doctrine of *sola fide* in his writings, even in a nascent form. By the same token it would be similarly wrong-headed to expect to find the repudiation of *sola fide* and a precision of expression that only prolonged controversy or academic analysis can bring to a concept. But what is clear from early on is that justification by faith is set firmly within Augustine's doctrine of grace rooted in God's election and the imparting to the will of prevenient efficient or efficacious grace.

Though anachronism is a danger in expecting to find a worked-out doctrine which only later controversy can bring, this does not imply that controversy, had it occurred, would have changed Augustine's mind. For it might have served simply to clarify his own characteristic view of justification more clearly against a *sola fide* view, for example, just as his views on predestination and efficacious grace were strengthened by the Pelagian controversy. To say that Augustine did not get clear on the distinction between justification and sanctification is merely to say that he was not a Reformation theologian.

A person's justification must begin at some point. How does it begin for Augustine? It standardly begins by divine justifying grace being infused at baptism. It is a priori unlikely that this beginning is equivalent to 'being made righteous' in the full Augustinian sense of the imparting of a completely new character, since that would call for an instantaneous change in character that might be said to smack of magic. So it is more likely to be 'the beginning of being made righteous', the start of that process by the imparting of certain dispositions, perhaps. The start of the process is not conditioned by a forensic change of status,⁵ but is the result of the imparting of regeneration, which in due course bears fruit. This marks the onset of being justified in his sense of justification, which develops in later life.

includes the element of subjective renewal. As far as I am aware there is no evidence that Augustine ever changed his mind over that, or even that his views on the meaning of justification were ever sharpened by controversy.

⁵ David F. Wright, 'Justification in Augustine', in Bruce L. McCormack (ed.), *Justification in Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker/Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2006), 58.

There is a good reason for his having had no other conception of justification than one that involves a change of the character of the subject of it. For Augustine had no conception of an alien righteousness, Christ's righteousness, being imputed to the sinner—an idea which comes to be an integral part of the Reformation understanding. It is true that the righteousness that is imparted is from God, and so is in this sense 'from outside', though not of course in the Reformation sense. The two conceptions of justification, Augustine's and that of the Reformation, appear to go together, at least to this extent: if justification is grounded in God's righteousness, then there must be a divine, unmerited source of such righteousness—even though for Augustine justification, the first stage of which involves the forgiveness of sins and subjective renewal, remains incomplete in this life. 'From Christ, in whom we are all justified, we obtain the remission not merely of original sin but also of the other sins we have added to it.'⁶ Forgiveness of sin is through Christ, but justification is due not to the imputation of his righteousness but through its impartation.

However, David F. Wright finds *some* evidence of the use of a declarative sense of justification in Augustine⁷ and comments that this 'is sufficiently developed to suggest that it was not devised solely for this occasion'.⁸ It might also be claimed that Augustine's overall views entail a declarative sense of justification even if he had no occasion to bring this out. For by the time of the Pelagian controversy (though not when he wrote to Simplicianus) Augustine had come to believe that Romans 7 was the language of the regenerate, and that although good actions were the fruit of divine grace, stemming from the 'inner being' (Rom. 7: 22), they were also, all of them, influenced by the remaining 'law of sin that dwells in my members'. He holds that the believer is never free in this life from the presence of indwelling sin, and in his anti-Pelagian writings makes continual reference not only to Romans 7 but also to 1 John 1: 8 and Philippians 3.

If sinful desires and sinful actions as they continue to occur in the believer need pardon (as they must), then if every action is tainted because it proceeds from a fallen though regenerate human nature (as it must be) no action can contribute decisively to justification. Whatever the text books may say, Augustine asserts, in one of his expositions on Romans 7,

⁶ Augustine, *The Merits and Remission of Sins and Infant Baptism*, II.20.34, quoted at Wright, 60. Wright's way of putting this may encourage us to forget that for Augustine the standard locus of such justification was paedobaptism.

⁷ Wright 61 2. The evidence is from Augustine's *On the Spirit and the Letter*.

⁸ Wright 62.

that ‘the good is incomplete when one lusts, even though the man does not consent to the evil of lust’, yet ‘he is not condemned who does not consent to the evil of the lust of the flesh.’⁹ So why is he not condemned even though he lusts?

(These things being so, it will be sin in the man who lives by faith ever to consent to an unlawful delight,—by committing not only frightful deeds and crimes, but even trifling faults; sinful, if he lend an ear to a word that ought not to be listened to, or a tongue to a phrase which should not be uttered; sinful, if he entertains a thought in his heart in such a way as to wish that an evil pleasure were a lawful one, although known to be unlawful by the commandment,—for this amounts to a consent to sin, which would certainly be carried out in act, unless fear of punishment deterred.) Have such just men, while living by faith, no need to say: ‘Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors’?¹⁰

Even those acts that are the fruit of God’s grace, because they are nonetheless imperfect, morally incomplete, need Christ’s pardon, and so, being themselves in need of justification, cannot themselves count decisively for justification.

So we might say that the two senses, the declarative and the renewing senses, run alongside each other, with the emphasis at the beginning of justification falling on a declarative meaning, the granting of the forgiveness of sins, whereas the process of justification is understood in terms of impartation, subjective renewal, with the eschatological sense of justification being once again declarative in character. Nevertheless, these ought not to be understood as self-consciously made distinctions. So it is natural that Augustine should veer between writing of justification as something attained, and at other points as only partly enjoyed.¹¹ The two, the initial event and the subsequent process, are connected—Wright says entailed¹²—in rather the way that (as we will see shortly) Calvin sees justification and sanctification being connected.

So on this evidence Augustine holds, indeed must hold, that there is a logical distinction between an initial declaration of righteousness and the infusion of renewing grace, though these are not temporally distinct phases.

Wright summarizes his view of the place of faith in justification for Augustine as follows:

⁹ Augustine, *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians*, in *St. Augustine: Anti Pelagian Writings*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1971), chs. 19 and 21 (quotation at p. 384). All quotations from Augustine’s anti Pelagian writings are from this translation.

¹⁰ *On the Spirit and the Letter*, ch. 65.

¹¹ Wright 62.

¹² Wright 65.

Augustine in fact teaches something close to a declarative justification by faith, perhaps even faith alone, but does so as part of a more comprehensive righteousness-making that embraces what most evangelicalism has called sanctification and that hence necessitates a faith effectively operative through love and hope. The key to understanding this is to fasten on justification as both event and process, as both beginning and growth.¹³

Wright also notes:

We should not lose sight of the genuine affinity between Augustine and the sixteenth-century Reformers on justification. It is well possible—and I have experienced this—to pass from reading extensively in Augustine’s writings of his anti-Pelagian years (which encompass the whole latter half of his theological life as a churchman) to Calvin, Bucer, Cranmer, Martyr and Knox without immediately being aware that they functioned with a different understanding of justification. What explains this misleading impression is the extent of agreement between Augustine’s emphases in those works and the Reformers’¹⁴

We will now briefly explore some of the areas of agreement and disagreement between Augustine and Calvin.

CALVIN ON AUGUSTINE ON JUSTIFICATION

Wright has this to say, in general, about why it is easy for the children of the Reformation both to read and yet to misread Augustine:

He cites Scripture at great length, and especially the Pauline Epistles, which establish for him salvation received by grace alone—the initiative is entirely God’s, who elects whom he wills—through faith apart from works performed in advance of reception, and faith itself the gift of God. That is to say, his anti-Pelagian writings in particular are replete with Pauline-inspired discussions of this kind, which do not call upon him to clarify repeatedly that *justifico* basically means ‘to make righteous’, or to show his readers how he understands the gift of justification—of being *justificati*—in relation to this normal meaning.¹⁵

I believe that it is in such general terms as these that Calvin rather guardedly appropriates Augustine on justification. Augustine sees clearly that justification (however exactly understood) is by grace alone. This is repeatedly expressed in the anti-Pelagian writings which were such a rich resource for the Reformers in establishing their views of the ‘servitude’ of the human will and the freeness and power of divine grace.

¹³ Wright 70. See also the quotation from Augustine at Wright 70 1.

¹⁴ Wright 71.

¹⁵ Wright 59 60.

Accurate as this may be as a view of Augustine's position, Calvin does not *quite* see him this way, for there is not much evidence that he identifies Augustine as even toying with the idea of justification by faith in a declarative sense, even though, as we have seen, Augustine may have done so, perhaps committing himself to that view (without realizing it) in what he writes. After all, a person might not be as aware as others are of the logical implications of views that he holds.

We can reconstruct Calvin's view of Augustine on justification by considering two lines of evidence. First we may note a striking fact, that throughout his discussion of justification Calvin cites Augustine voluntarily (that is, he is not forced into a citation through the pressure of controversy) and almost wholly with approval. The second line of evidence is the reasons that he provides where he thinks that Augustine is defective.

Here are some of the places where Calvin records his approval of Augustine:

And lest you suppose that there is anything novel in what I say, Augustine has also taught us so to act [i.e. to pay no regard to our works for justification]. 'Christ', says he, 'will reign forever among his servants. This God has promised, God has spoken; if this is not enough, God has sworn. Therefore, as the promise stands firm, not in respect of our merits, but in respect of his mercy, no one ought to tremble in announcing that of which he cannot doubt.'¹⁶

Besides, if it is true, as John says, that there is no life without the Son of God (I John. 5.12), those who have no part in Christ, whoever they be, whatever they do or devise, are hastening on, during their whole career, to destruction and the judgment of eternal death. For this reason, Augustine says, 'Our religion distinguishes the righteous from the wicked, by the law, not of works, but of faith, without which works which seem good are converted into sins.'¹⁷

The same thing is briefly but elegantly expressed by Augustine when he says, 'I do not say to the Lord, Despise not the works of my hands; I have sought the Lord with my hands, and have not been deceived. But I commend not the works of my hands, for I fear that when thou examinest them thou wilt find more faults than merits. This only I say, this ask, this desire, Despise not the works of thy hands. See in me thy work, not mine. If thou sees mine, thou condemnest; if thou sees thine own, thou crownest. Whatever good works I have are of thee.'¹⁸

¹⁶ *Inst.* III.13.4. The quotation is from Augustine's narration on Ps. 88 (tract. 50).

¹⁷ *Inst.* III.14.4. The Augustine quotation is from *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians*, 3.5.

¹⁸ *Inst.* III.14.20. The quotation is from Augustine on Ps. 137 (see also *Inst.* III.11.22, III.14.3, III.18.5, III.18.7).

It is in this fairly regular way that Augustine (and to a lesser extent Bernard) are cited, in order to emphasize *sola gratia*. Sometimes the citations are for a positive purpose, sometimes negative. Positive, in that salvation is due only to the merits of Christ, and negative, in that our own supposed 'merits' count for nothing as regards forgiveness and righteousness, are no ground of boasting, because only the merits of Christ count, and God working his graces in us.

With this line of evidence Calvin sometimes contrasts Peter Lombard (whom he calls the 'Pythagoras' of the later Sophists), who, though he had Augustine 'so often in his mouth' failed in his blindness to see that Augustine ascribed to man not the least particle of praise because of good works; and also he contrasts him with the schoolmen who teach that works have their value from divine 'accepting grace'.¹⁹ And he is scathing about the 'schools of the Sorbonne',²⁰ to which he gives separate attention in his *Antidote to the Articles Agreed Upon by the Faculty of Sacred Theology of Paris*.²¹

Despite this widespread positive use of Augustine, there are two issues on which Calvin faults him. The first has to do with his use of the term 'merit'. Calvin includes Augustine in a general condemnation of the introduction of the word into discussions of human character and action. Nonetheless, Calvin says, Augustine used it circumspectly:

I admit it was used by ancient ecclesiastical writers, and I wish they had not by the abuse of one term furnished posterity with matter of heresy, although in some passages they themselves show that they had no wish to injure the truth. For Augustine says 'Let human merits, which perished by Adam, here be silent, and let the grace of God reign by Jesus Christ' . . . You see how he denies man the power of acting aright, and thus lays merit prostrate.²²

The important point for Calvin here is obvious. Although Augustine and Bernard use the term 'merit', they do not reckon that the person who enjoys grace has himself merited it. The worth of the act is not due to an action of the person who performs it, but solely to divine grace.

Second, and more centrally, Calvin notes that for Augustine *justificare* connotes subjective renewal. Reviewing the way in which the biblical idea

¹⁹ *Inst.* III.15.7. See also Calvin's further reference to 'accepting grace' (*Inst.* III.14.12).

²⁰ *Inst.* III.15.7, III.18.9.

²¹ *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, ed. Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker, 1983), i. 72-120.

²² *Inst.* III.15.2. The Augustine quotation is from *The Predestination of the Saints*. In the same section Calvin also makes a similar reference to Bernard.

of justification had degenerated in the Church, Calvin says, in the first instance about Lombard:

You see here that the chief office of divine grace in our justification he considers to be its directing us to good works by the agency of the Holy Spirit. He intended, no doubt, to follow the opinion of Augustine, but he follows it at a distance, and even wanders far from a true imitation of him, both obscuring what was clearly stated by Augustine, and making what in him was less pure more corrupt. The Schools have always gone from worse to worse, until at length, in their downward path, they have degenerated into a kind of Pelagianism. Even the sentiment of Augustine, or at least his mode of expressing it, cannot be entirely approved of. For although he is admirable in stripping man of all merit of righteousness, and transferring the whole praise of it to God, yet he classes the grace by which we are regenerated to newness of life under the head of sanctification. Scripture, when it treats of justification by faith, leads us in a very different direction. Turning away our view from our own works, it bids us look only to the mercy of God, and the perfection of Christ.²³

So in Calvin's view Augustine subsumes 'grace', that is the grace of justification, under sanctification, subjective renewal. This is his account of Augustine's doctrine of grace using Reformation conceptuality—not that it is a meritorious consequence of renewal, for renewal is also the fruit of grace, but in Calvin's view Augustine holds that a person is justified as he is being renewed, and in being renewed. Apart from anything else, Calvin wishes to make space for the Pauline assertion that God justifies the ungodly. On Augustine's view of justification, God justifies the ungodly, but Calvin believes that he means something different (from the Reformers) by 'justification':

It is not unknown to me, that Augustine gives a different explanation; for he thinks that the righteousness of God is the grace of regeneration; and this grace he allows to be free, because God renews us, when unworthy, by his Spirit; and from this he excludes the works of the law, that is, those works, by which men of themselves endeavour, without renovation, to render God indebted to them . . . But that the Apostle includes all works without exception, even those which the Lord produces in his own people, is evident from the context.²⁴

He makes a similar point, though without mentioning Augustine, as follows:

There is no controversy between us and the sounder Schoolmen as to the beginning of justification. They admit that the sinner, freely delivered from condemnation, obtains justification, and that by forgiveness of sins; but under the term justification they comprehend the renovation by which the Spirit forms

²³ *Inst.* III.11.15 16.

²⁴ *Comm.* Rom. 3: 22.

us anew to the obedience of the Law; and in describing the righteousness of the regenerate man, maintain that being once reconciled to God by means of Christ, he is afterward deemed righteous by his good works, and is accepted in consideration of them.²⁵

There is ambivalence here, a certain awkwardness. On the one hand, we must not entirely approve of Augustine's thinking, 'or at least his mode of expressing it'. This suggests a mere verbal disagreement. On the other hand, the Bible's way of thinking 'leads us in a very different direction'. What is it in Augustine's way of expressing what he thinks that we may not approve of? It is not merely that Augustine uses the term 'merit', because that term can be given a good sense, even though (in Calvin's eyes) it came in the medieval Church to have a very bad sense. Augustine can hardly be blamed for that. Rather, it is that he muffles the vital point that justification and sanctification are not only inseparable but also distinct. For in the Augustinian way of thinking, while there is agreement that justification involves freedom from condemnation through forgiveness and the provision of righteousness, and that faith is active in it, subjective renewal is included in it. It is this merging of the two that, in Calvin's view, eventually led to appealing to good works as meritorious, and to the idea of supererogation on which the scandalous medieval abuses relied. Justification and sanctification are inseparable and *distinct*.

In his exposition of justification why is Calvin not more critical of Augustine? Why does he confine his reservations to a couple of places? There seem to be two main reasons. Generally, Calvin needs allies from the Fathers of the Church in order to counter the charge that justification by faith alone is a novelty, an innovation. Hence his reliance upon Augustine and Bernard of Clairvaux and, from a later period, the 'sounder schoolmen', who for some reason he declines to mention by name.

But, more particularly, what emerges from Calvin's positive attitude to Augustine is that what is crucial, and may perhaps be said to be even more important for Calvin than *sola fide*, is *sola gratia*. Why Augustine is so significant, and why his writings may be quoted so freely, to the discomfort (Calvin hopes and believes) of his own Roman Catholic opponents, is because for Augustine justification in his sense (i.e. both justification and sanctification) was by grace, without regard to human merit. Calvin is opposing a system of merit which is the pivot on which the abuses of his opponents are balanced. He believes that both Augustine and Bernard are firm allies in toppling it over, for both are clear that salvation is by

²⁵ *Inst.* III.14.11.

God's unmerited grace. In addition, in the case of Augustine at least, a prominent place is given to faith, and the life of faith, even though (as we have seen) the declarative sense of justification by faith is muted, or restricted in scope, by the standards of the Reformation. After all, Calvin may have believed that Augustine did not have to fight the battles that the Reformers had to fight, and so had no need to sharpen his thinking in this regard. Nevertheless, for Calvin justification by faith alone is the 'principal ground' of religion. If each of the twofold graces of Christ—justification and sanctification—is the result of God's sheer goodness alone, then a failure to distinguish the two, though mistaken, is not fatal. It becomes fatal only if this is coupled with false views of the contribution that one must make in order to be justified. Yet although justification and sanctification are distinct, they are nevertheless inseparably connected, as we will now see.

DUPLEX GRATIA—JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION

We come now to consider Calvin's creative touch, though a touch which, he would say, was already to be found in the Apostle Paul's teaching on union with Christ. So perhaps we should say that Calvin's touch consisted, in his eyes, in recovering the Pauline view.

What has come to be regarded as Calvin's fundamental statement on this matter is as follows:

I trust I have now sufficiently shown how man's only resource for escaping from the curse of the law, and recovering salvation, lies in faith; and also what the nature of faith is, what the benefits which it confers, and the fruits which it produces. The whole may be thus summed up: Christ given to us by the kindness of God is apprehended and possessed by faith, by means of which we obtain in particular a twofold benefit; first, being reconciled by the righteousness of Christ, God becomes, instead of a judge, an indulgent Father; and secondly, being sanctified by his Spirit, we aspire to integrity and purity of life.²⁶

The double grace, the benefit that we receive through faith, is reconciliation through Christ, justification and sanctification.²⁷ This summary precedes Calvin's treatment of justification by faith. But it is not the first reference in the *Institutes* to justification and sanctification together. It is noteworthy that in the *Institutes* Calvin's treatment of repentance follows

²⁶ *Inst.* III.11.1.

²⁷ For a first rate exposition of Calvin's view of the relation between justification and union with Christ as presented in the *Institutes* see Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., 'Justification and Union with Christ', in David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (eds.), *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P. & R., 2008).

faith, rather than precedes it. Repentance and faith are also two distinct states of affairs which cannot be separated. Repentance is ‘a real conversion of our life unto God, proceeding from sincere and serious fear of God; and consisting in the mortification of our flesh and the old man, and the quickening of the Spirit.’²⁸ In an effort to distance himself from what he regards as the misguided penitential practices of the papal Church Calvin thinks of penitence not as an act but as a disposition, not as a necessary precursor to faith but as what follows faith, both logically and temporally. It is likely that he would have been as dismayed by the penitent bench of the revivalist meeting as he was by the pre-Reformation penitential practices. Repentance is thus a basic element in sanctification, but though, logically speaking, it comes after faith it cannot do without faith. Quoting Paul (Acts 20: 22) he says:

Here he mentions faith and repentance as two different things. What then? Can true repentance exist without faith? By no means. But although they cannot be separated, they ought to be distinguished. As there is no faith without hope, and yet faith and hope are different, so repentance and faith, though constantly linked together, are only to be united, not confounded.²⁹

Repentance, then, stands for the entire life of renewal, for sanctification, as here:

Moreover, if it is true, and nothing can be more certain, than that a complete summary of the Gospel is included under these two heads, i.e., repentance and the remission of sins, do we not see that the Lord justifies his people freely, and at the same time renews them to true holiness by the sanctification of his Spirit?³⁰

And here:

Though both graces are obtained by faith (as has been shown elsewhere), yet as the goodness of God, by which sins are forgiven, is the proper object of faith, it was proper carefully to distinguish it from repentance.³¹

But though the two are to be distinguished in thought, they are inseparable in fact:

Those whom God is pleased to rescue from death, he quickens by the Spirit of regeneration; not that repentance is properly the cause of salvation, but because, as already seen, it is inseparable from the faith and mercy of God.³²

²⁸ *Inst.* III.3.5.

²⁹ *Inst.* III.3.5.

³⁰ *Inst.* III.3.19.

³¹ *Inst.* III.3.19.

³² *Inst.* III.3.21.

Calvin's references to Christ's double gift in the *Institutes* are not simply a piece of scholarly theological reasoning. The 'twofold' grace is prominent in the Catechism of the Church in Geneva (1545). In answer to the question 'What is the meaning of Baptism?' Calvin replies 'It consists in two parts. For *first*, Forgiveness of sins; and *secondly*, Spiritual regeneration, is figured by it. (Eph. 5.26, Rom. 6.4).'³³ In his *Form of Administering The Sacraments* (1537) he states: 'Thus we receive a twofold grace and benefit from our God in baptism, provided we do not annihilate the virtue of the sacrament by our ingratitude.'³⁴ In his *Brief Confession of Faith* (1536/7) he declares: 'I acknowledge that Jesus Christ not only justifies us by covering all our faults and sins, but also sanctifies us by his Spirit, so that the two things (the free forgiveness of sins and reformation to a holy life) cannot be dis severed and separated from each other.'³⁵ And in his *Confession of Faith in the Name of the Reformed Churches in France* he refers once more to the 'two graces' signified in baptism which are 'given us in Jesus Christ, and cannot be found elsewhere'.³⁶

Calvin makes plain that both justification and sanctification are equally the gifts of Christ.³⁷ In his discussion with Osiander, he says that 'as Christ cannot be divided into parts, so the things, justification and sanctification, which we perceive to be united together in him, are inseparable'.³⁸

How, more exactly, does Calvin understand the giving of Christ to us, the union with Christ which is at the heart of this conception of a twofold grace? It is, he says, a mystery and in this sense 'mystical'. Yet there are a number of positive things to be said. The first thing to note is that Calvin's use of 'union with Christ' and similar expressions may refer to different phases of salvation—they have slightly different senses and references. In the fullest sense the union is a bond of dependence which expresses itself in a common spirit between Christ and his people, and a common destiny. Various biblical figures are employed: membership of the body of Christ; marriage to Christ; adoption into God's family. But there is never a suggestion that such a union, though close, leads to a merging of identities or to a loss of identity.

In his debate over Osiander's view he gives a full account of the union:

³³ *Selected Works*, ii. 86.

³⁴ *Selected Works*, ii. 114.

³⁵ *Selected Works*, ii. 132.

³⁶ *Selected Works*, ii. 154.

³⁷ *Inst.* III.11.1.

³⁸ *Inst.* III.11.6. For further discussion see Mark A. Garcia, *Life in Christ: Union with Christ and Twofold Grace in Calvin's Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008).

Therefore, to that union of the head and members, the residence of Christ in our hearts, in fine, the mystical union, we assign the highest rank, Christ when he becomes ours making us partners with him in the gifts with which he was endued. Hence we do not view him as at a distance and without us, but as we have put him on, and been engrafted into his body, he deigns to make us one with himself, and therefore, we glory in having a fellowship of righteousness with him.³⁹

But he proceeds to deny that there is a gross mixture or transfusion of Christ into us.

The agent of this union is the Holy Spirit, Christ's Spirit. 'The Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually binds us to himself',⁴⁰ by calling us to Christ and imbuing us with virtues and graces, principally faith.⁴¹ 'For it is by the Spirit alone that he unites himself to us. By the same grace and energy of the Spirit we become his members, so that he keeps us under him, and we in our turn possess him.'⁴²

But behind this 'realized union', a union effected in time, Calvin recognizes an eternal union, union in a decretal sense. Calling in time, union with Christ in time, is founded on God's choice of us 'in him'. Commenting on Ephesians 1: 4–5, Calvin writes:

The foundation and first cause, both of our calling and of all the benefits which we receive from God, is here declared to be his eternal election . . . if we are chosen *in* Christ, it is *not of* ourselves. It is not from a perception of anything that we deserve, but because our heavenly Father has introduced us, through the privilege of adoption, into the body of Christ.⁴³

It is only partly true, then, to say that for Calvin we are united to Christ by faith. There is a more basic sense in which we are united to Christ in God's eternal choice, and that faith is a fruit of this union with Christ. It is that by which we appreciate the union and through which its blessings are conveyed to us, rather than that which establishes the union. So when A. N. S. Lane writes that according to Calvin '[i]t is the Holy Spirit that unites us with Christ, by faith, which brings us two major benefits—justification and sanctification'⁴⁴ this is somewhat ambiguous. It may appear that the Holy Spirit unites us to Christ as a result of our faith.

³⁹ *Inst.* III.11.10.

⁴⁰ *Inst.* III.1.1.

⁴¹ *Inst.* III.1.3 4.

⁴² *Inst.* III.1.3. Garcia draws attention to the 1555 correspondence between Calvin and Peter Martyr Vermigli in which they discuss different senses of 'union' (Garcia app. B).

⁴³ *Commentary on Ephesians*, 197 8.

⁴⁴ *Justification by Faith in Catholic Protestant Dialogue* (Edinburgh: Clark, 2003), 23.

But for Calvin it is the other way round. Christ by his Spirit unites us to himself and (as a fundamental part of this union) grants us faith.

So, summarizing, for Calvin justification and sanctification are distinct but inseparable graces, the gifts of Christ to his people, the fruit of their union with him:

These blessings are conjoined by a perpetual and inseparable tie. Those whom he enlightens by his wisdom he redeems; whom he redeems he justifies; whom he justifies he sanctifies. But as the question relates only to justification and sanctification, to them let us confine ourselves. Though we distinguish between them, they are both inseparably comprehended in Christ. Would you then obtain justification in Christ? You must previously possess Christ. But you cannot possess him without being made a partaker of his sanctification; for Christ cannot be divided.⁴⁵

Calvin offers the illustration of the sun from which both heat and light flow.⁴⁶ These are distinct, but inseparable. Heat is not light, nor light heat, but there is not one without the other.⁴⁷ He seems rather fond of it, for he uses it also in his examination of the Decree of the Council of Trent on Justification. He especially targets the Council's denial of *sola fide*. But, nonetheless, he maintains that justification and sanctification are constantly conjoined and cohere.⁴⁸ As befits the context, in his remarks on Trent Calvin occasionally uses scholastic terminology. Sanctification is an 'inseparable accident' of justification; not part of the essence of justification but inseparable in its relation to justification.⁴⁹ 'Why do they not remember what they learned when boys at school, that what is subordinate is not contrary?'⁵⁰ The language reveals a further point, that although justification and sanctification are inseparable, they do not have parity. Justification is prior; sanctification only takes place in those declared righteous.

Calvin underscores the serious way in which he takes the distinctness between each of the two gifts by the language that he uses of each. Uniformly, justification is connected with divine righteousness, with the acquiring of righteousness, the imputation of righteousness, having a status as righteous, and so on. For example, he defines justification in terms of the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness.⁵¹ By contrast, he has the almost uniform practice of not referring to the results of regeneration in

⁴⁵ *Inst.* III.16.1.

⁴⁶ Melancthon used the same imagery (see Garcia 207).

⁴⁷ *Inst.* III.11.6.

⁴⁸ *Selected Works*, iii. 114–16; cf. 152.

⁴⁹ *Selected Works*, iii. 148.

⁵⁰ *Selected Works*, iii. 128.

⁵¹ *Inst.* III.11.2.

those terms, but instead he uses a wide variety of other expressions, ‘integrity and purity of life’, ‘holiness and integrity’, ‘holiness and cleanness’, ‘virtues’, ‘reformation and newness of life’, ‘pious and holy living.’⁵² Only occasionally does he connect ‘righteousness’ to subjective renewal, and then rather obliquely. For example:

Accordingly through the blessing of Christ we are renewed by that regeneration into the righteousness of God from which we had fallen through Adam, the Lord being pleased in this manner to restore the integrity of all whom he appoints to the inheritance of life. This renewal, indeed, is not accomplished in a moment, a day, or a year, but by uninterrupted, sometimes even by slow progress God abolishes the remains of carnal corruption in his elect, cleanses them from pollution, and consecrates them as his temples, restoring all their inclinations to real purity, so that during their whole lives they may practice repentance, and know that death is the only termination to this warfare.⁵³

Though renewed into the righteousness of God, even here the stress is on integrity, and on the aspiration for righteousness, which is never achieved in this life. By contrast, being justified, believers have been immediately imputed with the perfect righteousness of Christ.

As far as I can see Calvin does not tell us why he expresses himself in these distinct ways, nor even that he is deliberately adopting a certain vocabulary. But the underlying thought is clear enough. It is that in his eyes justification is one act, changing a person’s status completely, perfectly, and permanently. But subjective renewal is partial, held back and compromised by remaining sin, and for this reason the states and actions of renewal themselves are imperfect and incomplete and need pardon.

We may spell out the logic of Calvin’s overall position as follows:

- (1) Justification is distinct from sanctification.

Because the two are inseparable, then

- (2) If A is not justified, then A is not sanctified.

and

- (3) If A is not sanctified, then A is not justified.

The use of the past tense is intended to indicate the ‘definitive’ element in sanctification, according to Calvin. Alternatively, in order to stress the

⁵² These expressions are all taken from *Inst.* III.11.1 12.

⁵³ *Inst.* III.3.9.

progressive nature of sanctification, we may express the relation between justification and sanctification as

(4) If A is not being sanctified/being sanctified, then A is not justified.

and, further,

(5) A is only sanctified/being sanctified if A is justified.

and

(6) A is only justified if A is sanctified/being sanctified.

Notwithstanding such inseparability, as we have seen according to Calvin justification is logically prior to sanctification. It makes sanctification possible, and also makes it necessary, though it must not be understood as a cause of sanctification. That is, there is an inseparability between these two distinct notions, and the faith that is indispensable to justification is also indispensable to sanctification. There is inseparability, and yet the faith that justifies is a necessary precondition of sanctification and so the distinctness between them is not temporal. For justification comes through relying on the promise of grace in Christ, for whose sake God declares the sinner righteous, pardoning his sins and imputing Christ's righteousness to him. God bestows sanctification on those who are justified. This same faith, trusting the word of God, is also essential for the life of faith, for sanctification in Calvin's sense, which has at its heart trusting the promises of God, living by faith and not by sight.

There is the further thought that true sanctification is unintelligible without justification since it is morally unthinkable that God should make holy someone who remains unjustified, unreconciled in the forensic sense. It is clear, then, that these distinctions and connections are logical rather than temporal, for there is no time when a person is justified and not sanctified, or being sanctified:

We dream not of a faith which is devoid of good works, nor of a justification which can exist without them: the only difference is, that while we acknowledge that faith and works are necessarily connected, we, however, place justification in faith, not in works. How this is done is easily explained, if we turn to Christ only, to whom our faith is directed and from whom it derives all its power. Why, then, are we justified by faith? Because by faith we apprehend the righteousness of Christ, which alone reconciles us to God.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ *Inst.* III.16.1.

It is also clear that the relation between faith and justification is rather special. For, after all, faith, believing, trusting, is itself a gift of God, as Calvin makes plain, a grace or virtue brought about by divine power. Justification then cannot be *on account of* faith in the sense that justification has faith as its ground, for the merit of Christ is the ground of justification. So how is faith a cause? It is, Calvin says, neither the material cause nor the efficient cause. It is the *instrumental* cause of justification.⁵⁵

So one thing further is needed to complete the logical pattern of Calvin's view of the relation between the twofold gift:

- (7) A is sanctified/is being sanctified only because he is justified.

As he puts it, God 'can love only those whom he justifies'.⁵⁶ Though, in an anticipatory sense, his eternal love for them issues in their justification, yet that love is manifested only to those whom he justifies.

We must bear in mind that Calvin has a strong teleological understanding of these notions. They are not merely, or chiefly, abstract concepts. They are necessary means to an end, the end being the restoration of the human race in Jesus Christ. We cannot, according to Calvin, lift them out of the means–end pattern and sensibly ask questions of their relationship in the abstract. We might be tempted to ask, thinking that this was a Calvinian question, could God decree that a person be justified and not sanctified? But this kind of question is in fact decidedly un-Calvinian. The appropriate question is: What is logically necessary and sufficient to achieve the divine aim for the race? Given this aim, then perhaps we may say, as we saw in Chapter 6 in a parallel fashion with the atonement, that there is only one way of achieving *this* end, even though there may be (for all we know) other means of achieving other ends. So the inseparable relation between justification and sanctification must be understood conditionally: If there is to be redemption and restoration through Jesus Christ, if people are to be members of his body, in union with him, and so on, then (we might ask) could that properly be effected in the case of a person who was justified and not sanctified, or sanctified and not justified? For Calvin, there is the only one appropriate response to that question; in fact, it answers itself: 'No!'

Perhaps in Calvin's stress on the 'double gift' of Christ there is another reason why his criticisms of Augustine's view of justification were gentle and muted. For while for Calvin justification is distinct from sanctification, sanctification is inseparably connected with it. And so

⁵⁵ *Inst.* III.11.7.

⁵⁶ *Inst.* III.11.11.

although subjective renewal is not of the essence of justification, it is an inevitable accompaniment of it. In other words, given the terms of the *sola fide* of the Reformation, Calvin comes as near as can be to including subjective renewal in justification without actually doing so.

So in one sense there is only a hair's-breadth between Calvin and Augustine, the difference between the meaning of 'justification' and 'sanctification'. They have distinct meanings for Calvin, and distinct values, and so cannot be merged or mixed. Nevertheless, they cannot be separated in fact.

A MERE SEMANTIC DIFFERENCE?

It is frequently claimed that the difference between Roman Catholic and Reformation views of justification is purely semantic. If we are aware of these differences in the meaning of the terms, then the Reformation conflict evaporates. The parties mean different things by the term, and so talk past each other. Calvin's attitude is rather different:

I would be unwilling to dispute about a word, did not the whole case depend upon it. For when they say that a man is justified, when he is again formed for the obedience of God, they subvert the whole argument of Paul, 'If righteousness is by the law, faith is nullified, and the promise abolished.' (Rom.iv.14) For he means, that not an individual among mankind will be found in whom the promise of salvation may be accomplished, if it involves the condition of innocence; and that faith, if it is propped up by works, will instantly fall. This is true; because, so long as we look at what we are in ourselves, we must tremble in the sight of God, so far from having a firm and unshaken confidence of eternal life. I speak of the regenerate; for how far from righteousness is that newness of life which is begun here below?⁵⁷

The ground or basis of justification is whatever it is that secures a person's acceptance with God. As we have seen in our discussion of Augustine and Calvin, in the thought of the Christian Church there have, broadly, been two accounts of what secures such acceptance. These are that acceptance is the infusion or acquisition of personal righteousness, involving a moral change in the one accepted and thus constituting one or the only ground of his acceptance by God, the internalist sense of justification. The other is that acceptance is essentially a change in status, the declaring of the one justified to be pardoned and righteous, the forensic or externalist sense of acceptance.

⁵⁷ *Selected Works*, iii. 115.

Unlike some, such as C. Stephen Evans, and Richard Swinburne,⁵⁸ it is clear that for Calvin the controversy over the meaning of justification that was integral to the Reformation conflict is not to be thought of as mere strife about a word, as mere logomachies. It is said or implied by such a suggestion that the parties classify the realities differently—one party conflates justification (forensic sense) and sanctification while the other does not—but that the realities themselves are one and the same. If these different uses of justification were merely different ways of saying the same thing, then to strive about which description is better might well be logomachy. If we argue about how many gallons are in the tank because you are measuring in American gallons and I in imperial, this is a strife about words—but not if we differ about the actual amount of petrol.

It is true that there are semantic differences, differences over what ‘justification’ means, but the differences between the Reformation and medieval Catholicism are not *merely* or *wholly* semantic.⁵⁹ The realities and their relationship together cannot be changed by changing the meaning of the word. Each account of justification attempts to answer the question: What is it that secures a person’s acquittal before God and his acceptance by God? And they give two sharply different and indeed incompatible answers to that question, calling their different answers by the same name, ‘justification.’ So there is a substantive, normative issue between the two views. If justification is what secures acceptance with God, then the two accounts of justification offer two different answers as to what acceptance consists in. And if what secures acceptance with God is an important matter, as presumably it is, then these real differences are also important differences.

FRANCIS TURRETIN ON JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION

An unintended consequence of the *locus* method of theologizing which gained in popularity with the rise of Reformed Orthodoxy after Calvin was that Calvin’s view of the inseparability of justification and sanctification, and the reason for this being the one, two-aspect gift of Christ, tended to be lost sight of. The work of Christ was seen as terminating in the Cross

⁵⁸ Evans, *Faith Beyond Reason* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 6; Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), 114.

⁵⁹ According to W. P. Stephens, Martin Bucer uses the term ‘justification’ ambiguously, meaning either to impute righteousness or to impart it. If so, this is a case of pure semantics, in which two senses of a word need to be distinguished to avoid confusion in understanding (Stephens, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Martin Bucer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 49).

and Resurrection. The idea of the risen Christ as the giver of the gifts of grace was not denied, but it was eclipsed. The application of redemption, in which sanctification plays a vital and important part, came to be the exclusive preserve of the Holy Spirit. Francis Turretin reflects this change of emphasis; a glance at his *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* reveals that his discussion of justification is physically separated from that of sanctification.⁶⁰ It is treated in a different *locus*, and this became standard in Reformed theology. Although in formal terms Turretin maintains the inseparability of justification and sanctification,⁶¹ because the two are discussed separately it is not clear in what the inseparability is grounded, what accounts for it.

Another possible explanation for this loss of the Christocentric emphasis in Calvin is the development of Covenant theology, particularly the controlling idea of the economic Trinity of redemption. So the various aspects of salvation and its application come to be partitioned between the persons of the Trinity who covenant together:

Now the necessity and truth of this connection [i.e. between justification and sanctification] is gathered on the part of God justifying, of Christ redeeming, of the Spirit regenerating. . . . God joined these two benefits in the covenant of grace. . . . Christ sustains a twofold relation—that of a surety and of a head. . . . Christ is given to no one for a surety to whom he is not given for a head, and so no one is justified by the merits of the surety (Christ) who is not sanctified by the efficacy of Christ (the head) after his image. . . . the Spirit, who is given to us, has a two fold name: the ‘Spirit of adoption’ who seals our justification; and the ‘Spirit of sanctification’ who begins and carries it forward.⁶²

Of course Turretin is not for a moment suggesting that the activities of the persons of the Trinity are divided; nonetheless, the emphasis falls upon justification being a work of the Son, and sanctification a work of the Spirit, and Calvin’s emphasis on Christ as the sovereign giver of both is eclipsed. In a similar fashion the work of Christ is dominated by his priestly satisfaction for sin. Of the eighteen questions covering the fourteenth topic of Turretin’s *Institutes*, ‘The Mediatorial Office of Christ’, one is devoted to his prophetic office, two to his kingly office, while seven are given over to the priestly office.

⁶⁰ *The Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. G. M. Giger, ed. J. T. Dennison (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P. & R., 1992 7), justification is the sixteenth topic, sanctification the seventeenth.

⁶¹ e.g. in XVII.i.i.

⁶² *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, XVII.i.xvi xxiii.

This is what is lost. On the credit side is an increasingly sophisticated understanding of justification by faith alone. Turretin has an interesting discussion of this. The eighth question (and answer) of the sixteenth topic is ‘Does faith alone justify? We affirm against the Romanists’. The question, he says, is not whether *declarative* justification requires works; for it does. The question is not, either, whether faith alone justifies ‘to the exclusion of the grace of God or the righteousness of Christ or the word and sacraments . . . but only to the exclusion of every other virtue and habit on our part’.⁶³

We must note here the recognition of a certain tension in the relation between justification and sanctification. Turretin says that faith is a virtue and habit. Every virtue or habit is excluded in acquiring justification save that of faith. The tension is heightened by his next statement, that the faith which justifies, in order to be true and living faith, cannot be separated from other virtues. And it is at this point that his way of relieving the tension becomes especially interesting. I quote *in extenso*:

(3) The question is not whether solitary faith (i.e., separated from the other virtues) justifies (which we grant could not easily be the case, since it is not even true and living faith); but whether it ‘alone’ (*sola*) concurs to the act of justification (which we assert); as the eye alone sees, but not when torn out of the body. Thus the particle ‘alone’ (*sola*) does not determine the subject, but the predicate (i.e., ‘faith only does not justify’ [*sola fides non justificat*], but ‘faith justifies alone’ [*fides justificat sola*]). The coexistence of love in him who is justified is not denied; but its coefficient or cooperation in justification is denied. (4) The question is not whether the faith ‘which justifies’ (*quae justificat*) works by love (for otherwise it would not be living but dead); but rather the question is whether faith ‘by which it justifies’ (*qua justificat*) or in the act itself of justification, is to be considered under such a relation (*schesei*) (which we deny).⁶⁴

That is, Turretin is maintaining that the sentence ‘Faith alone justifies’ is ambiguous, and for that reason perhaps even downright misleading. For it may be thought to entail the proposition that faith justifies in virtue of its being alone, that it is in the solitariness of faith that its capacity to appropriate justification consists. But this would be false and misleading, according to Turretin, for it would sever the connection between faith and other virtues such as love. Rather, the sentence should be taken to entail that it is only faith which justifies, in the sense that it and no other virtue is the instrument of justification. So the ‘only’ or ‘alone’ must be taken not

⁶³ *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, XVI.viii.v.

⁶⁴ *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, XVI.viii.vi.

to modify 'faith' (the subject) but rather 'justifies' (the predicate). Faith is not alone, but it alone justifies.

He explains the point in more familiar terms and at greater length in viii.xiv:

As it does not follow, the hand alone writes and the eye alone sees—therefore as much when torn from the head and the other members as in the body; the sole force of respiration is in the lungs—therefore the lungs can respire torn out from the liver and other viscera as well as when connected with them (which everyone sees to be absurd). There are hundreds of things of this kind which have a certain proper efficacy and effect which still, when separated from their adjuncts, lose all their power. Natural potencies are connected as to existence, but disjoined as to operation. Light and heat in the sun are most closely connected together, but still the light alone illuminates, the heat alone warms. Therefore, although the other virtues do not justify with faith, still faith cannot justify in their absence, much less the opposite vices being present. For faith cannot be true except in connection with the virtues (which if they do not contribute to justification, still contribute to the existence and life of faith, which the presence of vices would destroy).⁶⁵

What is the force of these counter-examples? It is to claim that whatever is a necessary accompaniment or condition of some power or virtue is not therefore an essential or intrinsic feature of that power or virtue. The argument that Turretin is addressing might be expressed as an attempt to effect a *reductio ad absurdum* of the idea of justification by faith alone as follows:

- (1) Suppose faith justifies alone.
- (2) But it is agreed on all hands that love is a necessary accompaniment or condition of justifying faith.
- (3) Therefore faith cannot justify alone.

To which Turretin counterargues:

- (1) Suppose faith justifies alone.
- (2) Love is a necessary accompaniment or condition of justifying faith.
- (3) Whatever is a necessary accompaniment of some power or virtue is not an essential or intrinsic feature of that power or virtue, as the following counter-examples testify . . .
- (4) Therefore it is possible that faith justifies alone.

⁶⁵ *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, XVI.viii.xiv. As we have seen, Calvin illustrates the same point by the same example.

So maybe the great Reformation rallying cry of 'By faith alone', which we have seen that Calvin insists upon, should be modified to 'Only by faith'. It certainly should be understood in this way according to Turretin. So the inseparability thesis lives on.

Faith does not contribute causally to justification, any more than does obedience. It is in no sense the ground of justification. Faith is essentially receptive, an acknowledgement, a recognition of what God in Christ has done, and in that sense (as we have already noted in Calvin) faith is the instrumental cause of justification. Being a cause in this sense can hardly be said to be equivalent to faith making a causal contribution to justification, as one of its grounds or its only ground. So whether or not faith is considered as a theological virtue, it is not because it is a habit or virtue that it justifies.

This brief discussion illustrates that Reformed Orthodoxy contributed both strengths and weaknesses. We have noted the sophisticated, analytic approach to the understanding of 'justification by faith alone', which surely adds to our understanding, and seems fully in accord with Calvin's *duplex gratia*. On the other hand, the *locus* method of theological organization, while also having the virtues of analytic strength, allowing each *locus* to be considered in its own right, means that there is no longer a controlling motif, such as Calvin's motifs of the knowledge of God and of ourselves, and of union with Christ, which provide unifying, synoptic themes binding together the various issues discussed.

CALVIN AND THE 'MORAL GAP'

There are three places in the *Institutes* where Calvin discusses the views of the Lutheran theologian Andreas Osiander (1498–1552). He considers his account of the image of God in man (*Inst.* I.15.3–5), and of the Incarnation (especially the questions of whether there would have been an Incarnation had there been no Fall) (*Inst.* II.12.5–7), and in his discussion on justification (*Inst.* III.11.5–12) he scathingly rejects Osiander's views on the part played by 'essential righteousness' in justification. It is this last discussion that concerns us here.

Like Calvin, Osiander thinks of justification in terms of our union with Christ, but for the Lutheran we become righteous not through free justification and the renewing of our character through union with Christ and the work of Christ's Spirit, the twofold gift, but by God actually imparting Christ's own divine righteousness to us in a much more substantive sense. It is not that we become God by some kind of ontological merging, for Osiander does not, according to Calvin, teach that in

justification God's *essence* is given to us, but that an *essential property* of God is given. (Yet this would seem to imply, on Osiander's part, that God's essence *is* imparted to us, for presumably, in virtue of the doctrine of divine simplicity, or even by virtue of the meaning of 'essence', if one essential property is given to us then all the other essential properties must also be, since they are not contingently related to each other.) Calvin skirts such metaphysical issues. Osiander, however,

clearly shows, that not contented with that righteousness, which was procured for us by the obedience and sacrificial death of Christ, he maintains that we are substantially righteous in God by an infused essence as well as quality. . . . he introduces a substantial mixture, by which God, transfusing himself into us, makes us as it were a part of himself.⁶⁶

There are two or three objections Calvin has to this idea, besides its basic metaphysical oddity. First, Osiander confuses union with Christ (in what Calvin regards as the Pauline sense) with a metaphysical diffusion of the deity of Christ in the soul. Second, he ascribes our justification to Christ's divine nature alone. Osiander leads us away 'from the priesthood of Christ and his office of Mediator to his eternal deity'.⁶⁷ That is, he ties justification to the infusion of the divine nature, a 'substantial mixture' of the divine and the human, but he has no role for Christ's human nature and therefore for his priestly office. Third, he mistakes the nature of sanctification:

For, in the whole of this discussion, the noun righteousness and the verb to justify, are extended by Osiander to two parts; to be justified being not only to be reconciled to God by a free pardon, but also to be made just; and righteousness being not a free imputation, but the holiness and integrity which the divine essence dwelling in us inspires. And he vehemently asserts that Christ is himself our righteousness, not insofar as he, by expiating sins, appeased the Father, but because he is the eternal God and life.⁶⁸

In Osiander's case our subjective righteousness is Christ's divine nature possessed by us and so (as far as Calvin is concerned) he splits Christ apart, disregarding the fact that it is as the incarnate mediator that Christ is united to us by his Spirit.

According to Calvin, 'Osiander derides us for teaching, that to be justified is a forensic term, because it behoves us to be in reality just . . . [He] objects that it would be insulting to God, and contrary to his nature,

⁶⁶ *Inst.* III.11.5.

⁶⁷ *Inst.* III.11.8.

⁶⁸ *Inst.* III.11.6.

to justify those who still remain wicked.⁶⁹ This kind of objection to the idea of forensic justification, and the idea of Christ as the substitute for his people, bearing their sin on their behalf, has become widespread. How can God call those righteous (by freely imputing his righteousness to them) who are not righteous? If Osiander is not the originator of this objection, the objection that justification by imputed righteousness is a ‘fiction’, he is certainly an early proponent of it.

Calvin’s response is predictable. He answers by once more stating his teaching that justification and sanctification are inseparable, and makes the further point that if justification depended in any way on subjective righteousness, since we experience remaining sin, and righteousness is only ever incomplete in this life, it could not be sufficient to make us pleasing to God, and would destroy assurance. (Yet, Osiander might reply, to have the Word of God infused in us is in fact sufficient, for we are thus fully God’s even though sin remains, and the knowledge of this infusion would be sufficient for assurance.)

Calvin does not directly address the ‘fiction’ objection, only in effect noting that the ‘fiction’ is not the whole story. Perhaps he would say that it is fictional *because* it is not the whole story. Throughout his life the believer is always subject to the judgement of death, as Calvin puts it.⁷⁰ So if it is always ‘as if’ the believer is clothed with the purity of Christ, the believer always stands in need of purity, since his own acquired purity is incomplete. This is, for Calvin, what pardon amounts to. Such pardon is grounded in the righteousness of Christ, realized by union with Christ in his death and resurrection, and so it is accompanied by renewal of character, even though that renewal is never completed in this life. But he seems to think it sufficient, at least as an *ad hominem* objection to Osiander, to point out that he too is involved in the same fiction, if that is what it is, since he ‘is forced to admit, that without forgiveness no man is pleasing to God.’⁷¹

In his book *The Moral Gap*⁷² John E. Hare is concerned with the gap between moral demand and human moral capacity to meet the demand. Initially he discerns three strategies that might be deployed to bridge the gap. One is to keep the moral demand intact but to exaggerate human capacities to live by it; the second is to reduce the moral demand; and the final strategy consists in appealing to naturalistic theories of assistance to meet the moral challenge. Hare rejects each of these naturalistic

⁶⁹ *Inst.* III.11.11.

⁷⁰ *Inst.* III.11.11.

⁷¹ *Inst.* III.11.11.

⁷² (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996).

approaches and instead invokes supernatural, divine assistance. This leads him briefly to consider the Christian themes of atonement, justification, and sanctification. He argues that living the good moral life requires belief in extra-human assistance.⁷³

Part of Hare's defence of this supernaturalistic strategy involves an account of justification which takes inspiration from Osiander (at least as the Lutheran's views are portrayed by Calvin in the *Institutes*). However, Hare subscribes not to Osiander's proposal of 'essential righteousness' but to a view of justification that involves the idea of incorporation, which he thinks of as a kind of substitution, but which in fact looks like a kind of sharing. On Christ's side this incorporation takes the form of wanting for others what he wants for himself, as a mother for a child, a husband for a wife, based upon a life together. In his account in the *Confessions* of the death of his unnamed friend Augustine uses Aristotelian language about 'another self' to characterize the depth of their relation:

I was surprised that any other mortals were alive, since he whom I had loved as if he would never die was dead. I was even more surprised that when he was dead I was still alive, for he was my 'other self'. Someone has well said of his friend, 'He was half my soul'. I had felt that my soul and his soul were 'one soul in two bodies'.⁷⁴

Hare utilizes such conceptuality in developing his idea of union.

For Hare, to be in Christ is for him to have this kind of relationship with us, a relation of deep friendship, a shared life, and for us, in a measure, to reciprocate. What is of interest here is not the plausibility of this view as a way of bridging the moral gap as Hare discerns this, but how he understands Calvin's view of justification, from which at this point he dissents.

Hare distinguishes three views regarding justification: the forensic view, Osiander's, and Calvin's—which he regards as being different from both of the first two. He describes Calvin's position in the following way. He quotes Calvin's comments on Colossians 3: 1–5 in the *Institutes*: 'In these words we are not only urged by the example of the risen Saviour to follow newness of life; but are taught that by his power we are renewed unto righteousness.'⁷⁵

Hare comments:

When Calvin talks about our being 'reborn into righteousness', he is identifying justification with the new life. It is through the resurrection that righteousness is

⁷³ Hare 270 1.

⁷⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), IV.iv.6. See also Paul Helm, 'Augustine's Grievs', in William E. Mann (ed.), *Augustine's Confessions* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

⁷⁵ *Inst.* II.16.13.

said to be restored and (our) life raised up, and this is a manifestation of the power and efficacy of Christ's death. Whenever, he is telling us, Christ's death alone is mentioned in the context of justification, we are to understand also what belongs to his resurrection. This is invaluable advice for understanding Calvin's own treatment of justification.⁷⁶

He goes on to claim that Calvin's emphasis is not on Christ's righteousness as external to us (as in the forensic view of justification, which he discards) but on the unity he establishes between himself and us. 'Calvin, in other words, has a doctrine of positive justification as well as a doctrine of negative justification.'⁷⁷

As an account of Calvin this is somewhat misleading, if not muddled, however. The passage which Hare cites from Calvin is from his treatment of the value of Christ's resurrection. Justification is not in view. When justification is in view then, as we have learned in this chapter, Calvin is as clear as daylight that in his view justification is what Hare calls external, or 'alien', the pardon of sin which for Calvin includes the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Justification is forensic, the declaring of the sinner to be righteous in view of the reckoning to him of Christ's righteousness.

When a little earlier Hare discussed the forensic view he claimed that it involves God in self-deception, a variant of the fictional objection just noted in connection with Osiander. Presumably this is one of his reasons for discarding it:

Suppose I am thinking of buying a house whose structure I can see to be fundamentally unsound. If I tell the owner to put new cladding on it, I may disguise the cracks; but I will be deceiving myself if I then buy the house. How can God see us as righteous if we are still just as rotten inside, but wearing the robe of righteousness? A second difficulty is that if justification is negative in this sense, this devalues the human response and makes problematic the necessity of faith for salvation.⁷⁸

God deceives himself because he sees as righteous someone who is in fact rotten. The robe of Christ's righteousness simply disguises the rottenness, it does not remove it. But the illustration about the house is not apt. Suppose I buy the house knowing about its problems and then set about rebuilding it. The status of the house has changed. It is now mine. It will be rebuilt. I will rebuild it because it is mine. No self-deception is involved. Or take a more apt illustration. Suppose that a wealthy, healthy couple adopt a Third World street child. That poor mite becomes their son or daughter. No self-deception here. But the mite is still, at the point of

⁷⁶ Hare 263.

⁷⁷ Hare 263.

⁷⁸ Hare 260.

adoption (let us suppose), diseased, malnourished, and untaught. The clear-eyed adoptive parents see this. Indeed, it was precisely because of the afflictions of this child that he or she was adopted. They immediately get to work cleaning, feeding, healing, and educating the youngster. On Calvin's view, the forensic view, justification is, like adoption, a change of moral status. But it is inevitably accompanied by moral renewal, sanctification.

So Hare's objection to the forensic character of justification is somewhat similar to Osiander's when he said (according to Calvin) 'that it would be insulting to God, and contrary to his nature, to justify those who still remain wicked'.⁷⁹ This is mentioned by Calvin just after he has said (commenting on 2 Cor. 5: 21):

He [Paul] certainly does not adduce the psalmist as a witness that pardon of sins is a part of righteousness, or concurs with something else in justifying, but he includes the whole of righteousness in gratuitous forgiveness, declaring those to be blessed 'whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered' and 'to whom the Lord will not impute sin'. He estimates and judges of his happiness from this, that in this way he is righteous not in reality, but by imputation.⁸⁰

Calvin's view of justification is clearly forensic, and pardon is not simply negative, the remitting of sins, but includes the imputation of Christ's righteousness. But, as we have seen, this is only one side of the picture, for (as he goes on) 'the gift of justification is not separated from regeneration, although the two things are distinct'. This is the characteristic Calvinian note being sounded once more: the two are distinct but inseparable, the twofold grace. For some reason Hare fails to see this, even though he refers to a relevant passage of Calvin.⁸¹ So Calvin's answer to Hare's objection would be to say two things. First, that since justification consists in the imputation of righteousness, when God sees a person as righteous he really is righteous, he is received into God's family, made a bona fide member of Christ's body. But he is not (simply in virtue of that fact) inwardly or subjectively righteous. He has a new moral status, but not a new moral nature. Second, the new moral nature is the inseparable concomitant of the new status, but it can never justify, not even contribute to, it, and so cannot be a part of the 'whole of righteousness'.

Calvin has a different view than Hare does of the moral gap. At a general level he is aware of and agrees with Aristotle's analysis of weakness of will, and of the deeper conflicts as expressed in Romans 7.⁸² But how is this gap to be bridged? If one is concerned with moral motivation, then according

⁷⁹ *Inst.* III.11.11.

⁸⁰ *Inst.* III.11.11.

⁸¹ Hare 264 n. 56.

⁸² *Inst.* II.2.23.

to Calvin the gap is bridged at regeneration. For then one receives a new nature characterized by a basic simplicity and integrity. But at the level of actual performance, the degree of success with which such motivation is translated into well-motivated action, the gap always remains in the present life because sin is always present in the believer to corrupt and pervert his basic intention:

Let the most perfect man descend into his own conscience, and bring his actions to account, and what will the result be? Will he feel calm and quiescent, as if all matters were well arranged between himself and God; or will he not rather be stung with dire torment, when he sees that the ground of condemnation is within him if he be estimated by his works? Conscience, when it beholds God, must either have sure peace with his justice, or be beset by the terrors of hell. We gain nothing, therefore, by discoursing of righteousness, unless we hold it to be a righteousness stable enough to support our souls before the tribunal of God.⁸³

So the moral gap is bridged, but also never bridged. Not, at least, before the grave.

⁸³ *Inst.* III.13.3.

Calvin the Compatibilist

IN this chapter I will attempt the following. First, to sketch Calvin's hierarchical form of determinism, which at the upper levels of the hierarchy is compatibilistic, or, more guardedly (as I will later on attempt to show), is partly compatibilistic. That is, his general outlook is that not only is human freedom and responsibility compatible with the divine decree, but that it is compatible with an immanent determinism. Second, I will try to display interesting similarities between Calvin's view and the Stoic version of compatibilism, and compare Calvin's attitude to Stoicism with that of Augustine in book V of the *City of God*. Third, I will attempt to answer the question 'Why, given the Stoic flavour of much of his thinking on human action, does Calvin object to Stoic fate?' Finally, I will consider the extent to which there are elements of hard determinism in Calvin, and then compare aspects of Calvin's determinism with some of the thinking of two later Calvinists, John Gill and Jonathan Edwards.

CALVIN'S BASIC POSITION

In *John Calvin's Ideas* I argued that John Calvin takes the view that I labelled 'hierarchical determinism' even though he did not avow this position in so many words. This is the view that there are different orders of being: the inanimate world; organic and non-organic; non-human animals; mankind and the angels. Such a view is consistent with an Aristotelian account of genera and species, though it does not entail it. Some of those orders, those of human beings and angels, are endowed with intelligence and will, and the will is by definition non-coercible.¹ So it cannot be that both a person wills and what he wills is the subject of

¹ These words of Harry Frankfurt seem to capture the idea of the will being not coercible: 'All of the movements of my will – for instance, my choices and decisions – are movements that I make. None is a mere impersonal occurrence, in which my will moves without my moving it. None of my choices or decisions merely happens. Its occurrence is my activity, and I can no more be a passive bystander with respect to my own choices and decisions than I can be passive with respect to any of my own actions' (*Necessity, Volition and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 79; emphasis in the original).

external compulsion. The philosophical importance of the hierarchy, as far as this chapter is concerned, is that Calvin's determinism is non-reductionist. His determinism is not biological, economic, or of some other general and reductionist kind, but it is a determinism of people, angels, non-human animals, and other organisms. He thinks of human beings as irreducible agents. His pronounced body–mind dualism affords further protection against a reductionist determinism.

While Calvin does not avow any form of determinism in so many words, or argue for determinism as such, there are a number of pieces of evidence which accumulate to make it reasonable to think that Calvin's outlook was deterministic. He frequently distinguishes acting freely from acting under coercion. In his *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will* he includes a short excursus, 'Coercion Versus Necessity', that establishes the difference, and this is in line with his discussion in the *Institutes*.² Distinguishing external coercion from inner determining factors of the will is one of the marks of compatibilistic determinism, for it is typically argued by such determinists that a person is free in so far as they do what they want to do, and unfree when they are externally coerced by physical or other pressure.

In addition, there are ways in which Calvin seems to affirm determinism, or at least to deny indeterminism. For example, in his discussion of what he regards as defective views of divine providence, Calvin says en passant:

Those do not err quite so grossly who attribute government to God, but still, as I have observed, a confused and promiscuous government which consists in giving an impulse and general movement to the machine of the globe, and each of its parts, but does not specially direct the action of every creature. It is impossible, however, to tolerate this error. For, according to its abettors, there is nothing in this providence, which they call universal, to prevent all the creatures being moved contingently, or to prevent man from turning himself in this direction or that, according to the mere freedom of his own will.³

The last words look like a clear rejection of a form of the liberty of indifference—as does Calvin's firm rejection of chance or causal contingency.⁴

Strangely enough, Calvin's doctrine of the bondage of the will to sin, which he shares with Augustine and with Martin Luther, for example, has

² *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will* (1543), ed. A. N. S. Lane, trans. G. I. Davies (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1996), 146–50. Compare *Inst.* II.3.5.

³ *Inst.* I.16.4.

⁴ *Inst.* I.16.8.

no necessary connection with the issue of the metaphysics of agency. This is because the bondage in question is moral and spiritual inability, a view about action types and not action tokens. When Calvin and Luther deny free will, therefore, they chiefly have in mind not the metaphysical issues being discussed in this chapter, but a spiritual disposition stemming from sin which is, logically speaking, neutral on the question of determinism and libertarianism. At the very most its consequence for the issue of metaphysical free will is that for those whose will is bound to sin there are certain types of motivation that they are incapable of, in rather the way in which a consistently cowardly person cannot act from courage, or a miser out of generosity.⁵

All this is on the side of Calvin's anthropology. In addition to this, Calvin has also to adopt a view of human choice which is consistent with his view of divine providence as meticulous, and with election and predestination:

God is the disposer and ruler of all things—that from the remotest eternity, according to his own wisdom, he decreed what he was to do, and now by his power executes what he decreed. Hence we maintain that, by his providence, not heaven and earth and inanimate creatures only, but also the counsels and wills of men are so governed as to move exactly in the course which he has destined.⁶

In the interests of preserving theological consistency it is possible so to deepen and enlarge the area of ineffability in the meshing of the divine decree and human choice as to allow that a libertarian view of human agency is not formally inconsistent with the divine decree. An instance of this can be found in Descartes's *Principles of Philosophy*, in which he claims both that God ordains all human actions and yet that many of these actions are indeterminately free. 'In this way we may have intelligence enough to come clearly and distinctly to know that this power is in God, but not enough to comprehend how he leaves the free action of man indeterminate.'⁷

But although Calvin has a place for ineffability, and there is some reason to believe that it is an important aspect of his general approach to the knowledge of God, there is no evidence to think that he enlarges and deepens its scope to such a degree that he is totally agnostic on the nature

⁵ I have discussed these different senses of 'free will' in chapter 6 of *John Calvin's Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁶ *Inst.* I.16.8.

⁷ *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, ed. E. A. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1931), i. 235.

of the powers of human agency, and on the relation between the divine decree and such powers.

So it is reasonable to conclude that although Calvin does not avow determinism in so many words, he nevertheless adopts a broadly deterministic outlook. The extent to which he holds that this determinism is compatible with human responsibility, and his way of thinking of this, is one of the matters to be discussed later.

Yet it also has to be said that even when discussing free will at length, as in his *Bondage*, Calvin does not enter into much discussion of the complexities and subtleties of voluntary action or the variety of ways in which action may be coerced. As just noted, Calvin denied that we, fallen creatures, have free will (in the sense of having power to choose at will what is good or what is evil) but he equally emphatically affirmed that the absence of free will in this sense does not entail coercion. Someone in bondage to sin may thus act voluntarily. One corollary of the affirmation of the bondage of the will to sin is that there is a sense in which what a person wills he wills necessarily; his bondage means he cannot but will evil. Yet for Calvin it does not follow from this that what a person chooses is coerced. The importance of the distinction for Calvin is that while, in general, acting out of necessity—both the metaphysical necessity of determinism and the moral necessity of a will in bondage to sin—is consistent with being held responsible for the action, and being praised or blamed for it, being coerced is inconsistent with such praise or blame. In his general criterion of voluntariness, and thus of responsibility, he tends to follow Aristotle:

When Aristotle distinguished what is voluntary from its opposite, he defines the latter as *to bia e di agnoion gignomenon*, that is, what happens by force or through ignorance. Then he defines as forced what has its beginning elsewhere, something to which he who acts or is acted upon makes no contribution (*Ethic.Nic.3.1*) . . . Now then, if you join this teaching about our faulty beginning to Aristotle's philosophy, you will with no trouble understand how sin, which it is not in our power to avoid, is nonetheless voluntary.⁸

Calvin's eclecticism in philosophical matters is clearly at work here. He appropriates Aristotle's conditions for responsibility but not Aristotle's indeterminism. What for Aristotle may be necessary conditions for responsibility he regards as sufficient conditions. And then he applies these conditions to 'our faulty beginning', the Christian doctrine of the Fall. For Calvin mankind, even though fallen, still possesses reason and will which are essential features of human nature.⁹ The way in which the behaviour of

⁸ *Bondage*, 150.

⁹ *Inst.* II.2.17.

plants and animals is determined is different from the way in which the human will is determined. Calvin stresses such differences as part of his hierarchism. The human will is determined 'from the front', by the agent's beliefs about what the world is like and is going to be like, as well as by his desires, and especially by his goals and the choice of the means to satisfy them. A person is not only acted upon, he acts.

Further, Calvin thinks that by appealing to various hierarchical levels of agency, to man, to Satan, and to God, the supreme agent, he is able to reject arguments of the form 'Since God has willed an evil, those who voluntarily do the evil are excused from responsibility for it'. He makes a particularly scathing application of this argument in his writings against the Libertines, some of whom seem to have had pantheistic leanings. In such passages Calvin's emphasis is not on God causing evil, or implanting evil, but on him 'finding' it (albeit that he decrees it), and using what he 'finds' for his own holy ends. God 'finds' it in the sense that creatures have essential natures with intrinsic powers. Given that he creates an individual of a certain kind, then as a consequence for the most part he respects the powers of that kind, miracles and other abnormalities excepted. In other words, Calvin attributes intrinsic powers to the various levels of agency, powers which agents at a higher level, even God at the supreme level, may employ and which in doing so they may occasionally override, but which they may not obliterate. Against the Libertine view that there is one Spirit and that everything that occurs is to be attributed to him directly, he retorts that on the biblical view of providence 'this universal operation of God's does not prevent each creature, heavenly or earthly, from having and retaining its own quality and nature and from following its own inclination'.¹⁰

Can we say more about the nature of this hierarchy? Perhaps to Calvin it appears so obvious that he does not see the need to elaborate on it. It is common sense, just as it lies on the surface of the biblical narratives. For example, in the story of Job, God, Satan, and mankind are on different levels not only in that Satan is employed in the Lord's work and Job is employed in Satan's work, but in the further sense that the reverse cannot happen. Job can use neither Satan nor God (though he can pray to God), nor can Satan use God.¹¹ This is not that there is some kind of moral prohibition of such a thing, but it is part of the nature of things. God can use Satan in a way that is in keeping with Satan's own nature. (Hazarding

¹⁰ John Calvin, *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines* (1544, 1545), trans. and ed. B. W. Farley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1982), 243.

¹¹ See the interesting brief discussion at *Inst.* I.17.7.

the charge of anachronism, we might say that Calvin, faced with Darwinian arguments, though he might concede that there is no sense to be given to the fixity of species in an absolute sense, nevertheless might hold that such a view is compatible with what one might call 'epochal essentialism', as is (to look no further) the use of the idea of categories of things. One sort of way in which such epochal fixity may be seen is in natural reproduction, the restricted possibilities of interbreeding, and the possession of an immune system.)

The other way in which Calvin's thought is resistant to the idea of a determinism that 'flattens' is that he somewhat reluctantly accepted Augustine's distinction between what God does and what he permits. His initial disinclination to do this has partly to do with his concern about potential misunderstandings of 'permission'. But it has also to do with his sense that the whole human race is under divine judgement because of their sin, and thus very many evils can be interpreted in terms either of divine retributive punishment or of fatherly chastisement. Yet not all evils, and certainly not the first human evil, the fall into sin, can be so interpreted. Calvin's reliance upon a hierarchy of distinct intentions, and the idea of divine permission, of non-intervention, seem essential in order to shield God from the charge that in ordaining the Fall he is the author of sin.¹²

The idea of 'permission' reminds us that because the divine decree is intelligent and not the determinism of impersonal forces God is able to take up distinct intentional stances with respect to different kinds of occurrences. So God decrees to bring about specific things, while he decrees to permit others. Nonetheless, for Calvin (as for Augustine) such permission of particular occurrences is a willing permission, and so it is causally sufficient for whatever is thus permitted; and yet God is not the author of sin, certainly not in the sense that in permitting evil his desires and intentions are themselves evil.

STOICISM AND COMPATIBILISM

From what we have learned so far it is clear that aspects of Calvin's position are consistent with a variety of philosophical outlooks. For example, his hierarchical determinism is consistent with Aristotelian essentialism: it was perfectly natural for someone in Calvin's era to interpret the 'kinds' of Genesis 1, for example, in broadly Aristotelian terms.¹³ We have also noted his Aristotelian outlook on the question of

¹² See the brief discussion of this in Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas*, 117.

¹³ See the reference to 'particular kinds' in his *Comm.* 1 Cor. 15: 38-9.

human accountability, a topic to which we will return. It may be that Calvin was somewhat eclectic, borrowing strands from various philosophical schools in an endeavour to articulate his Christian faith.

However, in further exploring Calvin's position on these issues I will argue that his view is remarkably coincident with important elements in Stoic views on determinism and compatibilism. Basic to this coincidence is the adoption of what is an essentially Stoic view of action, at least as such a view is reconstructed for us by Susanne Bobzien and Ricardo Salles.¹⁴ So I will argue that despite his virulent objection to 'Stoic fate' Calvin appropriates the Stoic view of human agency, or something remarkably like it, as an important element in his view of providence. It would be a mistake to see his objection to Stoic fate as signalling a principled rejection of all elements of Stoicism.

Were we to attempt to make a case for Stoic influence on Calvin by arguing for direct historical connection with Stoic ideas we could find plenty of evidence for this. For Calvin, as for us, no complete Stoic writings from Chrysippus or Cleanthes or Zeno survive.¹⁵ So we must be careful to remember that for Calvin 'Stoic' is a rather generic term, the name for a type of philosophical outlook, probably mediated to him principally through Seneca and Cicero, and (of course) Augustine, and to a lesser extent perhaps also through Tertullian and Eusebius of Caesarea.¹⁶

Like us, he faced the general difficulty of identifying nuances in Stoicism because their views are only known *in extenso* second-hand. Calvin was knowledgeable about the Stoics chiefly because he was familiar with those Roman writers who have communicated Stoic ideas to us. This is my justification, in what follows, for referring to 'Stoicism' unqualifiedly, though with the help of Bobzien and Salles it will be possible sometimes to be a little more nuanced than this.¹⁷ Calvin's first published work was an elaborate commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia* (1532). Seneca was

¹⁴ Bobzien, *Determinism and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998); Salles, *The Stoics on Determinism and Compatibilism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

¹⁵ L. P. Gerson, *God and Greek Philosophy: Studies in the Early History of Natural Theology* (London, Routledge, 1994), ch. 4.

¹⁶ Calvin was familiar with two significant sources of Stoic views: Tertullian's *Apologia* and Eusebius of Caesarea's *Preparatio Evangelicae* (see Anthony N. S. Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1999)).

¹⁷ For a survey of Calvin's relation to Stoicism see Charles Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), ch. 8, pt. I. However, in this chapter Partee does not broach the possible influence of the Stoics on Calvin's view of human agency.

regarded as the ‘best known and most widely read exponent of Stoicism’.¹⁸ Calvin also approvingly cites Cicero’s *On the Nature of the Gods* in his formulation of and discussion of the *sensus divinitatis*, making use of the idea of *prolepsis* in so doing.¹⁹ There is explicit evidence of a direct appeal to Stoicism, but it is not my intention to follow up such connections here. For as usual what is of interest to us is the coincidence of ideas rather than their provenance.

However, if it is plausible to suppose that the Stoics influenced Calvin in his views of human action, then whatever story one might tell of how that influence was mediated has to be compatible with the less positive things that Calvin believed about Stoicism, particularly his repudiation of ‘Stoic fate’. Why was he so negative?

Stoic metaphysics was a kind of pantheism, with the world as a whole being assigned an intelligence and wisdom that we find expressed in particular aspects of nature, but especially in the whole of it. The intelligence of the whole accounts for the beauty and interconnectedness of the parts. The universe is thus organic,²⁰ an orderly interconnection of parts such that every body is causally connected with every other body, either directly or through intermediaries.

Providence therefore is not the sustaining and governing of the universe from a point beyond it, as with classical theism, but it is the immanent unfolding of the powers of the universe, a brute fact about it, in accordance with principles of intelligence and foresight. It is this view of universal nature that yields the Stoic account of providence. And ‘God’ or ‘the gods’ or Zeus are the personifications and deifications of certain of these immanent powers according to their scale, importance, and interest for human beings.

As each divine power confers its own benefits, so it is recognized as a god in accordance with the importance of the benefits which it confers, and the power which resides in each of the gods is expressed in their names, as in the examples I have given. The common custom of our human life has also brought it about that men who have conferred outstanding benefits upon mankind have been

¹⁸ *Calvin’s Commentary on Seneca’s De Clementia* (1532), trans. with an introd. and notes Ford Lewis Battles and André Malan Hugo (Leiden: Brill, 1969), introd., p. 49. This introduction provides an interesting account of the Stoic influences on the young Calvin.

¹⁹ E. Grislis, ‘Calvin’s Use of Cicero in *Institutes* I. 1 5: A Case Study in Theological Method’, *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 62 (1971), 5–37. For an account of the Stoic influences on the young Calvin see ‘The Historical Background to the Seneca Commentary’, in *Calvin’s Commentary on Seneca’s De Clementia*.

²⁰ Gerson 147.

deified out of gratitude. Hence the deification of Hercules, of Castor and Pollux, of Aesculapius and of Liber . . . A great number of gods have also been derived from scientific theories about the world of nature. Endowed with human shapes, they have provided fables for the poets and have permeated human life with every form of superstition. This subject has been treated by Zeno and explained at greater length by Cleanthes and Chrysippus. For example, it was an old legend of the Greeks that the Sky-God [Uranus] was mutilated by his son Saturn and that Saturn in his turn made captive by his son Jupiter. These impious tales are merely the picturesque disguise of a sophisticated scientific theory.²¹

So the one divine universe can be distinguished into separately identifiable powers, and they may be called gods. But there is no transcendent Creator-God, nor is there room for one. As Bobzien remarks:

We know that the picture cannot be that of a transcendental deity who devises a plan and then realizes it in the world. There is no space for either god or god's plan outside the world. Both god (the active principle) and god's reason or *boulesis* are part of the *one* material world.²²

It seems to follow from this Stoic view of the universe that they are materialists, denying the existence of independent entities with a non-bodily nature, perhaps arguing that only what is material has efficacious causal power,²³ and operating with a kind of verificationism according to which it would be impossible for us to 'grasp' any immaterial entities that might be posited.²⁴ Yet, as is clear from the quotation from Cicero just given, the Stoics had the basic belief that there are, within the one organic, causal, purposive order of the universe, distinct kinds of causal powers. Some of these were deified, others formed a hierarchy according to what they could do and could happen to them; for example, some possessed reason, some not. These powers are *de facto* irreducible, and, because for the Stoics there was no metaphysics beyond physics, what is *de facto* irreducible comes to be thought of as *de jure* irreducible. So Stoicism may be thought of as a kind of pluralistic materialism, not a monistic, reductionist materialism of the sort with which modern science has made us familiar. In particular, in this hierarchical arrangement, objects, including organisms, possess a range of active principles depending upon their place in the hierarchy.²⁵

In more detail, for the Stoics there are three (irreducible) kinds of the active principle, *pneuma*, according to whether *pneuma* is found in

²¹ Cicero, *The Nature of the Gods*, trans. H. C. P. McGregor (London: Penguin, 1972), 147–8. See Bobzien 45.

²² Bobzien 53.

²³ Gerson 145.

²⁴ Gerson 146.

²⁵ Bobzien 32.

inorganic matter, organic matter, or in individuals capable of sense perception and movement. *Pneuma* functions differently according to the kinds of things it works in and through and by which it expresses itself. So we can say in the case of the three propositions ‘The stone is rolling down the hill’, ‘The wisteria is growing rapidly’, and ‘Joe is thinking of his dinner’ not that the universe is rolling down the hill, growing rapidly, or thinking of its dinner, but that the universe is such that the stone is rolling down the hill, the wisteria is growing rapidly, and Joe is thinking of his dinner. There is one universe having differently working parts or aspects, yet all integrated into one whole. In the deterministic outlook of the Stoics the effects of such active principles are themselves the outcome of some external stimulus, though the character of this interplay between the two seems to have become a matter of debate within Stoicism.²⁶ Whether human actions are only partly the outcome of such stimuli or wholly so is something that we must look at further.

Human voluntary action falls within the organic, causal nexus of the universe, and so the Stoics are determinists. Given this deterministic system, for the Stoics there are ‘chance’ events only in an epistemic sense,²⁷ and free actions, actions for which the agent is responsible, must be consistent with this deterministic outlook. So they are compatibilists. In the case of voluntary agents, causes work differently from the way they work in non-human animals or plants or rocks. While there are causes that work commonly throughout nature, antecedent causes, there are also ‘perfect and principal causes’, causes that operate in accordance with the natures of the things in question. In the case of human beings, volitions, voluntary mental acts, are internal causes, and are, in general, expressions of the agent’s nature, not only that nature in general, but of the unique individual nature of each human being.²⁸ In the first instance causes are not events but the capacity of a body, including a human being, to bring about changes in certain characteristic ways.²⁹

As a way of preparing for their discussion of compatibilism we observe that the Stoics distinguish, as already noted, between external and internal determination. It was a general distinction, and a fairly obvious one to observe by anyone who wishes to address these questions, a distinction not only drawn by the Stoics but also by Aristotle. The issue for the Stoics is whether or not there can in fact be a place for voluntariness in their explicitly deterministic scheme, and whether, if there is, it is sufficient to

²⁶ For detailed and illuminating exposition see Bobzien chs. 2–4.

²⁷ Gerson 151.

²⁸ Gerson 152.

²⁹ Bobzien 251, 253.

deliver responsibility. Or must determinism, however nuanced, in the end be reducible to ‘externalist determinism’? Are the causal forces in action necessarily external causal forces that have their causal origin and efficacy in a manner that does not depend upon the assent of the mind, but are also causes of such acts of assent?

The Stoics argued against the Epicurean charge that all causal determination is ultimately external, even if the route of some such determination is through the mind, and in particular through the act of assent. They were sensitive to the argument that if everything has an antecedent cause then acts of assent, acts of the mind, also have antecedent causes, which sooner or later will be external causes.³⁰ If one tracks back through a chain of causes of action, then it seems that sooner or later they will cease to be internal, acts of assent or judgement say, and will become external, causes from without the brain or mind, which form and produce the brain and its character and its products, and which continue to act upon it. For, they plausibly argue, if something external causes something internal, it will not be voluntary in the sense required or (in their view) sufficient for responsibility.³¹ We can’t (so the Stoics averred) be held responsible for an action whose cause is wholly external to us.

However, according to Salles, Chrysippus, for example, maintains that while there may be an external causal relation between A and B, it does not follow that B is wholly determined by A:

This distinction enables Chrysippus to claim that the existence of a causal relation between our impulses (and acts of assent) and our external environment does not *by itself* imply that the former are fully determined by the latter. In addition to external states and events, the occurrence of acts of assent and impulses involves internal causes; they are fully determined, or sufficiently brought about, by the combination of these two elements, *not* by the external factors alone.³²

So, Chrysippus holds, our voluntary activities, those for which we are responsible, are partly but not fully determined by factors that are external to us, but to be fully determined they require the addition of ‘internal causes’. This is the root of the Stoics’ compatibilism: action for which a person is responsible is a combination of external causal factors and internal causal factors, each necessary, together sufficient, for the bringing to pass of a given responsible action.³³ Cicero (interpreting Chrysippus) seems to Salles to argue that the internal act of assent (a ‘perfect and

³⁰ Salles, 40.

³¹ Salles 41.

³² Salles 41; emphasis in the original.

³³ Salles 43.

primary' cause) has explanatory priority over the external cause ('proximate and auxiliary'), but Salles doubts that this is generally Chrysippean.³⁴

The Stoics famously illustrated the distinction between external and internal factors in the following way. Suppose a cylinder is pushed, and rolls down a slope. The course of the cylinder is determined not only by the force that pushes it down the slope, and the characteristics of the slope, such as the degree of its incline, and of its smoothness, but by the cylindrical shape of what is rolling. An exactly similar force applied under identical conditions to something on the slope with the shape of a rugby ball would result in the object rolling in a way that is distinct from the way in which the cylinder rolls. The cylinder rolls in one way, or is capable of rolling in that way, but is incapable of rolling in the manner of a rugby ball, and vice versa. The power to roll in its characteristic way is possessed by the cylinder in view of its shape (and density and elasticity, no doubt). These features are judged to be 'internal' to it, they are part of what it takes for something to be a cylinder and not a rugby ball, and its distinctive progress down the slope is a function both of what is external and what is internal to it, its cylindrical shape.³⁵

Similarly, Chrysippus argued, with an act of assent, understood either as characteristic of humans in general, or as characteristic of this human at this time. It is 'internal' as the shape of the cylinder is internal to the object that is the cylinder. But of course for this argument for the distinction to be successful, and for it to be a convincing argument for compatibilism, it is necessary that the internal factor that Chrysippus cites in the case of human action is not itself solely a product of external factors.³⁶ Otherwise he is simply postponing the moment when his Epicurean (or other) opponent will play the externalist card. May not the mind and its powers themselves be formed by an earlier set of external factors? Salles suggests a way out of this objection by arguing: Suppose we hold that the internal nature of the mind is unique to the agent; it is not imparted to the agent externally, but is part of what it means to be that agent, 'temporally coextensive with the agent'.³⁷ External causes are not by themselves sufficient to impose agency on some individual; agency arises partly from these causes and partly from other causes. But this looks weak as a protecting wall around compatibilism unless the progress of an externalist account of human individuality and uniqueness can be blocked.

One important feature that is distinctive of human nature in this hierarchy, according to Stoicism, is its possession of assent, of *krisis*,

³⁴ Salles 45 6.

³⁵ Salles 45.

³⁶ Salles 46.

³⁷ Salles 47.

which may mean the power of judgement or, obviously allied with it, of critical judgement,³⁸ though being critical in this further sense one has to have reflected on whether whatever is 'judged' is the case. So judgement can refer either to unreflective acceptance or to reflective acceptance; each is a case of *krisis*. It seems that for the Stoics it is such critical rationality which is an expression of rationality proper. But the point is that here is something that is distinctively rational having to do with the use of judgement, to be contrasted with the instincts of non-human animals and with human impulse or reflex or unreflective judgement.³⁹

Someone who acts with judgement governs himself internally, and without compulsion, even though that person lacks the power of alternative choice, either earlier or at the time of judgement, as to whether a course of action be chosen or not.⁴⁰ So, for Stoicism fate, or providence, operates within us, or partly or chiefly within us—wholly so in so far as we are responsible for what we do; fate is not an external power carrying us along and which prevents us, despite our best endeavours, exercising a certain choice as a result of which some consequence is fated to occur. It is through our inner constitution, unique to each individual, that fate operates. This routing through the inner constitution, provided that it appropriately involves the critical judgement, is a sufficient condition for the possession of responsibility for the ensuing action, for praise or blame.⁴¹ So there is a faculty of assent which cannot be externally coerced. A person acts in accordance with his individual nature, expressed in his various assents, and so is responsible for the outcome. As the immediate and decisive cause of the action, responsibility is located in him. So people in these circumstances cannot rightly claim that their actions are not due to them but to externally operating fate.⁴² Such voluntariness,⁴³ which is obviously more than the mere feeling of being unconstrained, is thus the source of the Stoics' compatibilism.

The modern outlook is in general unhappy at the prospect of locating responsibility in individual human nature, but has a strong tendency to press back to sets of external causes such as the environment, genetic endowment, microphysical particles, or the like. For the Stoics, consistently with their determinism, individual nature or character has an irreducibility. We are the individuals we are. Education and other external circumstances may, if we are fortunate, develop and fine-tune our

³⁸ Salles 55.

³⁹ See Clement of Alexandria (150 c.213) (Salles 58).

⁴⁰ Salles 61 2.

⁴¹ Salles 68.

⁴² Bobzien 254.

⁴³ Defined at Salles 33 4.

characters, but they can never provide those characters nor (except in extreme circumstances) deprive us of them. It is through the distinctive mix of powers of each of these individual characters, with their associated powers of judgement, that fate works. It does not produce the characters *ab initio*, but works with them. We might call this the doctrine of the irreducibility of life chances.⁴⁴

Stoic determinism is not developed in terms of uniform laws of nature, and of event causation, but through this combination of external causal factors and individual natures. The question 'In these circumstances at this time, could I have done otherwise than I did?', which is so characteristic of modern discussions of determinism and freedom, does not engage them. Instead they operate with a concept which Bobzien calls 'un-predeterminist freedom'; that is, freedom such that it is not fully determined whether or not I perform a certain course of action, 'but in the same circumstances, if I have the same desires and beliefs, I would *always* do/choose the same thing'.⁴⁵ Causes are not principally events, but objects such as people with their individual natures, desiring and choosing at particular times and places. Un-predeterminist freedom differs from the indeterminism of modern discussion because it does not require that the agent have the ability to do otherwise in precisely the same circumstances. But nor is Stoic freedom, acting in accordance with one's own nature, the mere psychological freedom of later compatibilists such as Hume.

CALVIN AND THE STOICS

Salles's comments on Stoic ideas of god's providence provide a natural point of departure for a comparison with Calvin:

To be sure, it has been predetermined all along by god's providence that I would begin to exist at a certain point in time and that I myself would have the peculiar quality that I have. But, for the reasons just mentioned, this cannot imply that my mind is externally determined by god. What is externally determined, if anything, is the *matter* that has been predetermined all along to take on that specific peculiar quality. In this respect the internal nature and force of the mind is not externally determined, at least not *fully* so determined.⁴⁶

When the Stoics (as reported by Cicero) discuss providence they have the ability to switch in a rather disconcerting way from talking about the

⁴⁴ Bobzien 29.

⁴⁵ Bobzien 277.

⁴⁶ Salles 48; emphasis in the original.

activity of the gods, or of God (in the way we have characterized these above) to talking about nature. So in book II of *The Nature of the Gods* Balbus says that by providence they do not refer to a god, say to Fortuna, whose task it is to govern the universe. Providence refers instead to the gods who, having divine wisdom, are collectively the agents of providence. At the same time he affirms that 'all things are subject to the laws of nature, by which they are ordered in the best possible way'.⁴⁷ Here he seems to assert that the universe orders itself without any help from the gods, and he proceeds to provide a 'naturalistic' account of providence in terms of the four basic substances: earth, air, fire, and water.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the universe is not the product of the chance collocations of such elements, but of an immanent principle of reason, displaying properties such as wisdom which it is reasonable to attribute to 'the gods':

So when we see the movement of the heavenly bodies, the speed of their revolution, and the way in which they regularly run their annual course, so that all that depends upon them is preserved and prospers, how can we doubt that these too are not only the works of reason but of a reason which is perfect and divine?⁴⁹

These works are created for the gods and men, who excel all other creatures because they are endowed with reason. So providence, whether considered in religious or philosophical terms, is this ordering of the whole by immanent rational principles, for the benefit, *inter alia*, of mankind, who (alone with the gods) possess reason. And, in addition, their view is that the striking and important ways in which nature works rationally in this sense can legitimately be personified and deified.

'Stoic fate' is objectionable to Calvin partly because he objects to the connotations of the word 'fate' but chiefly because God, as Creator and preserver, not only drives the universe but sustains and cares for it. He 'stands apart' from his creation, not occupying either time or space. It is only possible to understand what providence is if we first have a grasp of God as Creator whose work is not 'momentary' but whose power shines 'not less in the perpetual condition of the world than in its first creation':⁵⁰

The nature of the Stoics' supposition is known. They weave their fate out of a Gordian complex of causes. In this they involve God Himself, making golden chains, as in the fable, with which to bind Him, so that He becomes subject to

⁴⁷ *Nature of the Gods*, 156.

⁴⁸ *Nature of the Gods*, 157.

⁴⁹ *Nature of the Gods*, 163.

⁵⁰ *Inst.* I.16.1.

inferior causes . . . Let the Stoics have their fate; for us, the free will of God disposes all things.⁵¹

For we do not with the Stoics imagine a necessity consisting of a perpetual chain of causes, and a kind of involved series contained in nature, but we hold that God is the disposer and ruler of all things—that from the remotest eternity, according to his own wisdom, he decreed what he was to do, and now by his power executes what he decreed. Hence we maintain that, by his providence, not heaven and earth and inanimate creatures only, but also the counsels and wills of men are so governed as to move exactly in the course which he has destined.⁵²

So providence is not enclosed within a ‘natural influx’,⁵³ nor does it continue by a general impulse, as if the different kinds of things follow one original act of empowerment, and what God has once determined flows on by itself. Calvin thinks there is a deistic flavour to Stoicism as well as to Epicureanism.⁵⁴

Calvin’s objection to Stoic fate is rather to deny their argument, or assumption, that since every element in the universe is necessary the entire universe is necessary in the same sense of necessity: solely the product of immanent forces. Calvin objects to the term ‘fate’ because to use it would stigmatize the truth of God. More substantially, the Stoics had no doctrine of divine creation. But this rejection of Stoicism as the whole story of providence is quite compatible with Stoicism being part of the story. I will argue that Calvin, possibly through borrowing partly at least from Augustine, reckoned that a hierarchical compatibilism of the Stoic kind can be a component within his account of providence in theistic terms.

Providence and human agency

I will begin by noting what Calvin and the Stoics say about the nature of the causal activity of people. Neither Calvin nor (as we have seen) the Stoics hold the view that the future is fixed regardless of what men and women desire that future to be, and what they intend and bring about. For the Stoics, a person is fated to enjoy or suffer something not irrespective of their desires and intentions, but through their operation. That is to say, most events are not fated in isolation, but co-fated in a causal and in some cases a teleological sequence.

For the Stoics, such co-fatedness had a varied character. Some events are causally necessary and sufficient for others. If Laius is fated to have a son, then he is fated to have intercourse with the son’s mother-to-be.⁵⁵

⁵¹ *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (1552), trans. with an introd. J. K. S. Reid (London: Clarke, 1961), 170.

⁵² *Inst.* I.16.8.

⁵³ *Inst.* I.16.3.

⁵⁴ *Inst.* I.16.4.

⁵⁵ Bobzien 201.

Sometimes they are logically necessary. If Milo is fated to wrestle, then he is fated to have an opponent to wrestle with, since it is logically impossible to wrestle without having someone to wrestle. So Laius cannot 'simply' be fated to have a son, or Milo to wrestle. Doing either involves other people, and so the fact that Laius is fated to become a father (if he is) cannot be a recipe for idleness, as opponents of Stoicism claimed. But the relation of the elements that are co-fated may be weaker than such a necessary causal connection, it may involve the existence of general but not universal connections; in order for me to recover from my illness it may be necessary for me to consult the doctor, and necessary that I know this, but I may consult the doctor and still not recover. It may in general be necessary for me to take care if I am to cross the road safely, but I may on some occasions be careless and still make it to the other side. As Bobzien says:

For the 'efficiency' of the refutation of the Idle Argument (which after all is applied to particular situations, since actions are particulars), the existence of an empirically accessible, universal relation of necessary condition is not required and no causal theory with universal laws of nature has to be presupposed. For a non-futile action it is sufficient that there is a chance that the action matters for the outcome in that there is a probability that it is a necessary condition for triggering or preventing a prospective cause from being active and thus furthers a certain envisaged result.⁵⁶

So, for both Calvin and the Stoics, because the order of things is a causal, teleological order, we cannot be idle or imprudent if certain of our goals are to be achieved. The Stoics reject the 'idle argument' that if the future is fixed then there is nothing that we presently do that can affect or influence it.

So, transposing this outlook into Calvin's theism, while it was eternally ordained by God (let us suppose) that Joe climbs the ladder, God's decree that he does so is a necessary condition of the truth of 'Joe climbed the ladder'. But it is not by itself sufficient, because the decree has also to take effect in time. In ordaining that Joe climb the ladder God must also ordain that there is an available ladder, that Joe was not too frightened to climb it, that he had an objective for which ladder-climbing is necessary, the desire to climb, and so forth. And for this sort of scenario to be a cure for Joe's idleness then he must want to climb the ladder, knowing or believing that it is (probably) connected with something further that he wants to achieve. Such factors have to be ordained in the correct causal and teleological order and to 'fall out' thus.

⁵⁶ Bobzien 225 6.

Further, this co-fatedness is what explains why Joe uses the ladder, in a way that merely to assert ‘He was fated to climb the ladder’ does not.⁵⁷ ‘Whatever you do it was fated that you do it’ offers no guidance as to what you should do. To the question ‘Why are you turning on the television?’, ‘Because I am fated to turn it on’ or ‘God has decreed that I do so’ are not justifying reasons for that action in the way that ‘Because I want to see the match this afternoon’ is. They are not reasons because (according to Stoicism) I am fated to do everything I do, or (according to Calvin) everything I do is decreed by God. But (in general) I have no epistemic access to the future. All I know (by past experience in some fashion) is that in order to watch the match this afternoon I have to take necessary steps to do so. I might not take those steps, and still, by a series of unintended coincidences, see the match that I wanted to see. But this is no way to live. Effort is causally contributory to an envisaged end. Calvin is assuming, of course, that for the most part God does not disclose the future to us until it becomes the present. So he is saying that at the human level action causally contributes to what occurs, and so having reasons to do a certain action and to refrain from doing another sort of action are explanations of why I act or forbear to act. Nevertheless, what I do is necessitated by the divine decree.

Of course both Stoic fatalism and Calvin’s appeal to the divine decree impose fixity on the sequences of events. Yet if the type of fatalism (for the Stoics) or providence (for Calvin) were that sometimes called logical or ‘simple’ fatalism, such that Joe is fated to climb the ladder whether he wants to or not, or perhaps even though he does not want to, and particular events are fated in abstraction from any particular causal nexus, then his wanting or not wanting to climb the ladder does not explain anything about how it comes to be climbed. Nothing explains that except fate, or the God of such fate. Calvin cites Cicero’s *De Fato* on the connectedness of means and ends.⁵⁸

In the *Institutes* Calvin’s appeal to co-fatedness (he does not use the term *confatalia* as far as I know) occurs in a variety of contexts. His use of it to reject the idle argument occurs in his discussion of the use to which the doctrine of providence ought to be put. Those convinced of the doctrine should view their lives and the lives of others not only in terms of secondary causes, which he here calls ‘means’, but in terms of God’s will, the primary cause. But in referring to the primary cause they should also not forget or neglect the place of secondary causes:

⁵⁷ See the detailed discussion of this point at *Inst.* I.18.2.

⁵⁸ *Inst.* I.17.4.

For he who has fixed the boundaries of our life, has at the same time entrusted us with the care of it, provided us with the means of preserving it, forewarned us of the dangers to which we are exposed, and supplied cautions and remedies, that we may not be overwhelmed unawares. Now, our duty is clear, namely, since the Lord has committed to us the defence of our life—to defend it; since he offers assistance—to use it; since he forewarns us of danger—not to rush on heedless; since he supplies remedies—not to neglect them. But it is said, a danger that is not fatal will not hurt us, and one that is fatal cannot be resisted by any precautions. But what if dangers are not fatal, merely because the Lord has furnished you with the means of warding them off, and surmounting them? See how far your reasoning accords with the order of divine procedure: You infer that danger is not to be guarded against, because, if it is not fatal, you shall escape without precaution; whereas the Lord enjoins you to guard against it, just because he wills it not to be fatal.⁵⁹

Such immanent causation, the order of secondary causes, coincides with part of the Stoic view, the considerations used to rebut the idle argument. Where it differs is that for Calvin God is at work through these chains of immanent causation; that is, they have a transcendent causal source and not, as with Stoicism, a merely immanent source. What happens is the result of God's use of means to achieve his ends—means which he also decrees, of course—and also announces the connection between means and ends. If I am destined to post the letter, then I am destined to use the appropriate means to post it. If I want to cross the road safely, then I must (usually) be alert to the traffic. This connection of means and ends, or, more precisely, this general though not universal connection of means with ends has, for Calvin, a consequence that may seem surprising. There is an element of 'as if' in Calvin's practical approach to providence. While the future is fixed we approach the future as if it were open. He says:

Hence as to future time, because the issue of all things is hidden from us, each ought to so to apply himself to his office, as though nothing were determined about any part. Or, to speak more properly, he ought so to hope for the success that issues from the command of God in all things, as to reconcile in himself the contingency of unknown things and the certain providence of God.⁶⁰

There does not seem to have been the same emphasis in early Stoicism. Later Stoics, such as the Roman Stoic Epictetus (c.55–c.135), had a great interest in the moral value of their outlook. Fatalism should promote a

⁵⁹ *Inst.* I.17.4. It is here that Calvin cites Cicero's *de Fato*, at a point where Cicero cites Chrysippus' appeal to *co* fatedness with approval. For a similar expression of Calvin's outlook see *Eternal Predestination*, 171.

⁶⁰ *Eternal Predestination*, 171; see also *Inst.* I.16.8.

prudent approach to life, to living within one's limits, avoiding recklessness and risk, and so living in accordance with nature. According to Bobzien, Epictetus (and no doubt others) was thus future-orientated, whereas earlier Stoics such as Chrysippus tended to be past-orientated.⁶¹

Calvin's outlook here is rather different. He has a concept of nature, though it does not play a central role in his thought on providence. The pivot is 'the will of God', understood as covering both the command of God and his decree. Confidence in the wisdom, power, and grace of God that belief in his providence promotes, and a willingness to do what he has commanded arm us against the undeniable vagaries and (epistemic) uncertainties of what God has decreed. Nevertheless, there is something of the Stoic in this:

But when once the light of divine providence has illumined the believer's soul, he is relieved and set free, not only from the extreme fear and anxiety which formerly oppressed him, but from all care. For as he justly shudders at the idea of chance, so he can confidently commit himself to God. This, I say, is his comfort, that his heavenly Father so embraces all things under his power—so governs them at will by his nod—so regulates them by his wisdom, that nothing takes place save according to his appointment; that received into his favour, and entrusted to the care of his angels, neither fire, nor water, nor sword, can do him harm, except insofar as God their master is pleased to permit.⁶²

There is another context of Calvin's in which co-fatedness is invoked, though again not in name. Calvin argues that God's determination confers necessity on what otherwise would not be so. He gives the example of Christ's bones:

At the same time, that which God has determined, though it must come to pass, is not, however, precisely, or in its own nature, necessary. We have a familiar example in the case of our Saviour's bones. As he assumed a body similar to ours, no sane man will deny that his bones were capable of being broken, and yet it was impossible that they should be broken (John 19.33, 36). Hence, again, we see that there was good ground for the distinction which the Schoolmen made between necessity, *secundum quid*, and necessity absolute, also between the necessity of *consequent* and of *consequence*. God made the bones of his Son frangible, though he exempted them from actual fracture; and thus, in reference to the necessity of his counsel, made that impossible which might have naturally taken place.⁶³

⁶¹ Bobzien 333; see also Salles ch. 6.

⁶² *Inst.* I.17.11.

⁶³ *Inst.* I.16.9; see also *Eternal Predestination*, 170.

The prophecy (i.e. a revelation of a divine decree) that none of Jesus' bones will be broken is co-fated (or co-decreed) with the failure of anyone to break any of his bones. So what failed to happen depended upon the prophetically announced decree and is explained by it. The co-fatedness (or co-decreed) account of Jesus' bones would be something like: 'The infallible prophecy, Jesus' bones will not be broken, is co-decreed with certain other events—e.g. that there are no successful attempts to break them, or no attempts at all, and no "accidental" breakings.'

The ultimate explanation of why events, including human actions, occur is not in the last analysis to be referred to any immanent set of causes, much less to a set of causes to which God himself is bound. Calvin is not willing to consider the power of such a series, particularly the idea of a necessary set of causes, apart from the one who ordains it, Almighty God. But this does not mean that Calvin denies the existence of such a series. It is simply that this is not the whole story. What it does show is that Calvin is not attracted by immanent fatalism and in particular he is adamantly opposed to astrological fatalism, the more so if it is claimed not only that the stars are merely the evidence of fate, but that they act independently of God—and even more so were it claimed that even God himself is bound by what is written in the stars, written by a non-divine hand.⁶⁴

So it is the type of causal necessity that is at issue between Calvin and Stoicism (and not chance or fortune). This is underlined by the next question considered by Calvin in the *Institutes*.⁶⁵ Does nothing happen by chance, nothing by contingency? The question obviously implies a negative answer. So the necessitarian presumption is retained. Nevertheless, even for Calvin, human choices are voluntary in an irreducible sense. God necessitates all that happens, but in a way that is consistent with the varied natures of things. It follows that 'chance' is for Calvin a purely epistemic term, following Augustine:

I say then, that though all things are ordered by the counsel and certain arrangement of God, to us, however, they are fortuitous—not because we imagine that Fortune rules the world and mankind, and turns all things upside down at random (far be such a heartless thought from every Christian breast); but as the order, method, end, and necessity of events are, for the most part, hidden in the counsel of God, though it is certain that they are produced by the will of God, they have the appearance of being fortuitous.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *A Warning Against Judicial Astrology and Other Prevalent Curiosities* (1549), trans. Mary Potter, *Calvin Theological Journal*, 18 (1983), 157–89.

⁶⁵ *Inst.* I.16.8.

⁶⁶ *Inst.* I.16.9.

Augustine is approvingly noted by Calvin as one who rules out chance, and even rules out that things occur partly by man's free choice, partly by divine providence, and 'he also excludes the contingency that depends on human will'.⁶⁷

So it is clear that Calvin, though ostensibly taking a *via media* between fortune and chance on the one hand and Stoic necessity/fatalism on the other, is, like his mentor Augustine, in virtue of his commitment to divine sovereignty, inclined more to the side of fatalism than to the side of fortune and chance, or to some view of providence which has to find place for the 'contingency which depends on human will'. The sense of fortuitousness is purely epistemic, since necessity is the basic metaphysical component in his account of providence.

'That which God has determined, though it must come to pass, is not, however, precisely, or in its own nature, necessary.'⁶⁸ It is a case of the necessity of the consequence, not of the consequent. This necessitarianism is not logical necessity or in some weaker sense inevitable, having a causal necessity deriving only from immanent forces. If God had created a Stoic world, adopting a deistic stance towards it, this would not for Calvin have been equivalent to the Christian doctrine of providence, because it would lack the divine attention that is paid to the governing of each particular.

Calvin's form of compatibilism is grounded in the autonomy of human (and angelic) agency, like the Stoics'—autonomy in the sense that human agency is not simply the effect of sets of external forces. In this sense God works through those distinct individual natures that he has created and upholds, and not merely through laws of nature and initial conditions which together are causally necessary and sufficient for everything that occurs in the world.

All of this reminds us that in so far as Calvin is a determinist as a result of holding his view of providence he does not avow determinism, any more than he avows providence, for theoretical reasons. He does not adopt his view of meticulous providence because he thinks that it solves philosophical problems. Undoubtedly, his doctrine of primary and secondary causes (taken from the medieval tradition) and his distinction between doing and willingly permitting (taken from Augustine) involve theoretical, philosophical difficulties. Calvin acknowledges as much when he stresses the mysterious character of the doctrines that involve these distinctions. Yet he adopts these views, aware of their

⁶⁷ *Inst.* I.16.8.

⁶⁸ *Inst.* I.16.9.

attendant difficulties, because he believes that other views involve an even greater difficulty, that of not doing as much justice to the scriptural data as his own view.

So it is doubtful that Calvin thinks that appealing to a hierarchy of agents, and his utilizing of the distinction between doing and willingly permitting are sufficient to *explain* God's relation to sin. One clue to this is that he frequently appeals to the 'modesty and sobriety' of his immediate readership to ward off what he regards as invalid inferences of both a theoretical and a practical kind. If someone draws the inference that because he is an instrument of divine providence then he is not to be blamed for his evil, Calvin regards this as a serious mistake not because he can provide a convincing argument to the contrary, but because (as, he believes, his Christian readers will readily concur) such a proposal is immodest. Why should someone think of making such an inference except to further express and to safeguard their wickedness?⁶⁹ To objections of a more theoretical kind, that don't express such an antinomian tendency but focus instead on Calvin's failure to demonstrate his position, he would I suspect be more accommodating. But because he is ultimately concerned to foster the correct practical religious responses to the doctrine of providence rather than to offer a satisfactory explanation of it, the plain fact is that he is less interested in pursuing the theoretical issues. His confidence in his position does not arise from a belief that he has explained it, or answered all objections to it, but because he is persuaded that this is what Scripture teaches:

Our true wisdom is to embrace with meek docility, and without reservation, whatever the holy Scriptures have delivered. Those who indulge their petulance, a petulance manifestly directed against God, are undeserving of a longer refutation.⁷⁰

Here, as elsewhere, Calvin's first aim is *persuasio* rather than *demonstratio*.

Human responsibility

We have noted important differences over the theology of providence between the Stoics and Calvin, but also similarities in their view of a universal causal order of nature, a natural hierarchy of agencies, and their rebuttal of the idle argument. If we consider the other half of compatibilism, the grounding of human responsibility, then I believe we can identify more similarities. In adopting a very similar view to that of the Stoics of

⁶⁹ See the objection Calvin considers in *Inst.* I.17.5 and his reply in I.17.6.

⁷⁰ *Inst.* I.18.4.

the place of human activity in bringing about the future, Calvin also locates human responsibility in a similar place.

As it is an abuse of the doctrine of divine providence to adopt the idle argument, so it is an abuse of it to use it to dodge our responsibility. Calvin focuses particularly upon responsibility for evil, and we will later discuss his asymmetrical treatment of responsibility for evil as against responsibility for doing good. It is a mistake to refer evil to ‘simple providence’, a phrase which seems to echo the Stoics’ ‘simple fate’. To do so is—as with propounding the idle argument—to neglect the relation between ends and means. Divine providence is not ‘simple’; it is a complex connection of different kinds of secondary causes and secondary effects:

As all contingencies whatsoever depend upon it [providence], therefore, neither thefts nor adulteries, nor murders, are perpetrated without an interposition of the divine will. Why, then, they ask, should the thief be punished for robbing him whom the Lord chose to chastise with poverty? Why should the murderer be punished for slaying him whose life the Lord had terminated? If all such persons serve the will of God, why should they be punished? I deny that they serve the will of God. For we cannot say that he who is carried away by a wicked mind performs service on the order of God, when he is only following his own malignant desires.⁷¹

Calvin’s remarks here take us, I believe, immediately to the heart of his view of human accountability. For like the Stoics Calvin develops his account of providence not from a view of causal regularity, but, like them, he appeals to the irreducibility of agency and of life chances. The fact that some are better placed than others Calvin resolves not into the brute fact of fate, but into the decree of God, who decrees some to prosper and others to suffer, and elects some to his grace, bypassing others. In sympathetically expounding Stoic views about life chances Bobzien notes that the modern outlook regards such differences as unfair. But, she goes on to say, this is to fail to recognize the element of luck, luck in different starting points, luck in different outcomes, luck in the possession of one character type or other.⁷² For ‘luck’, Calvin would substitute ‘the divine will’. This may seem heartless, but it is quite consistent with adopting policies of social and personal amelioration, as Calvin also saw.

Further, in what Calvin says about the metaphysics of agency, as far as I am aware he never raises the question of whether a person could, in exactly the same circumstances, have done otherwise than he did. In other

⁷¹ *Inst.* I.17.5.

⁷² Bobzien 299.

words, Calvin is unaffected by accounts of compatibilism that depend upon the necessity of universal laws of nature, or of libertarianism that depend upon the denial of the operation of such laws in the case of the human will. It is true that unlike the Stoics he occasionally discusses and rejects the freedom to do otherwise, as in the passage in *Institutes* I.16.4 quoted at the beginning of this chapter. But this is not at all surprising given the influence exerted upon him of the Pelagian controversy and of Augustine's part in it.

It is Calvin's hierarchical view of the created order, a view substantially similar to the Stoic view, which enables him to put flesh on his two-wills doctrine, which is a vital component in his account of providence and evil. God wills in the sense of commands, and wills in the sense of decrees; and he may decree what he forbids, as he did, paradigmatically, in the case of Jesus' crucifixion. How do the two levels of causation each retain their integrity? Because for Calvin, at the level of wicked human action, for example, an evil person is wholly absorbed in his evil. He is an autonomous centre of wicked action. The evil action is to be explained in terms of an evil intention for which the agent is responsible.⁷³ The agent is thus a cause in his own right, and his action is not merely the outcome of sets of external causes.⁷⁴ Had there been an evil precept from God which his wickedness was obedient to, he would also have been free from blame. But his wickedness is a deliberate breaking of the divine command. God does not will this breach, in the sense of giving the person a command to do what is wicked, and God is not himself the author of the action at the secondary level, yet on account of another end that God has he justly wills the defection.⁷⁵ Why is it a part of providence? Because it's also an *ordained* evil action.

The internality requirement for responsible human action is thus the product of features some at least of which are distinctively human. The point here is that the human mind is a sort of thing that cannot be wholly externally determined, otherwise it functions in a way characteristic of things which do not possess minds, things like trees and stones. But this is not very convincing as a qualification or nuance in determinism that will provide a justification for compatibilism not otherwise available. For while in a sense it is not my mind that is predetermined by God, since I did not have a mind to be predetermined, yet what my mind was to be was predetermined by God.

⁷³ *Inst.* I.17.3.

⁷⁴ *Inst.* I.18.2.

⁷⁵ *Inst.* I.18.4.

Calvin's view of the providential order is remarkably similar to the Stoic non-reductionist, hierararchical view, together with its avowed determinism and compatibilism, and (so it seems) he in effect bolts it on to his view of providence. Perhaps it was because of Calvin's enthusiasm for aspects of Stoicism that Philip Melanchthon regarded Calvin's view of providence as 'Stoic' and nicknamed Calvin 'Zeno':

Look at the madness of our times, the Allobroga battles (amongst the Genevans concerning predestination) concerning Stoic necessity are so great that someone has been shut in prison for disagreeing with Zeno. Lelius relates that he had written to a certain chorupsaio (Io. Calvin) that he should not fight so vehemently. Those of Zurich (Tigurini) are of a milder disposition.⁷⁶

A PRECEDENT IN AUGUSTINE?

I have argued that there is clear evidence that some of Calvin's ideas in his account of providence run parallel with those of Stoic compatibilism. It is not therefore out of the question that he was directly influenced by them despite his disapproval of what he calls Stoic fate. But we have not probed the historical question of whether this parallelism indicates causal influence. As we have noted Calvin became acquainted with Stoic ideas through Seneca and especially Cicero, and perhaps in other ways. Did he derive his ideas about human freedom, voluntariness, responsibility, and so forth directly from reading Cicero and other ancient sources of Stoic ideas? Perhaps he did. But perhaps there is a more obvious and straightforward explanation of the transmission of their ideas to him. For there is precedent for this selective appropriation of Stoic ideas closer to Calvin's hand.

In book V of the *City of God* Augustine also makes use of such ideas, as I will briefly show. Perhaps there is more here than merely a precedent. Perhaps Calvin's acquaintance with the *City of God* contributed to his own approach, and given his familiarity with Augustine this is more than likely. There may be circumstantial evidence in favour of this. In book V, chapter 9 Augustine discusses Cicero's opposition to Stoicism and to the idea of astrological fatalism by his use of the claim that there is no knowledge of the future because the future is indeterminate. He has this to say about fate:

⁷⁶ From a letter of Philip Melanchthon to Camerarius (1 Feb. 1552), in *Corpus Reformatorum*, xvii, ed. C. G. Bretschneider (Brunswick: Schwetckhe, 1863–1900), 930. This is cited in Egil Grislis, 'Seneca and Cicero as possible Sources of John Calvin's View of Double Predestination: An Inquiry in the History of Ideas', in E. J. Furcha (ed.), *In Honor of John Calvin 1509–1564* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1987), 29.

[W]e neither deny an order of causes wherein the will of God is all in all, neither do we call it by the name of fate, unless fate be derived of *fari*, 'to speak', for we cannot deny that the scripture says: 'God spoke once, these two things . . .' But let Cicero wrangle, and his fellows, that say this order is fated, or rather fate itself; which we abhor, because of the word's being chiefly used in a false sense: but whereas he denies that God knows assuredly the set order of those causes, we detest his assertion, worse than the Stoics do . . . And therefore our wills are of as much power as God would have them, and knew beforehand that they should be; and the power that they have is theirs free, to do what they shall do truly and freely: because He foreknew that they should have this power, and do these acts, whose foreknowledge cannot be deceived. Wherefore if I wish to use the word fate in anything, I would rather say that it belonged to the weaker, and that will belonged to the higher who has this other in his power, rather than grant that our liberty of will were taken away by that set order which the Stoics (after a peculiar phrase of their own) call fate.⁷⁷

And Calvin this:

Those who would cast obloquy on this doctrine, [Calvin's doctrine of providence] calumniate it as the dogma of the Stoics concerning fate. The same charge was formerly brought against Augustine (*Contra duas epistulas Pelagianorum ad Bonifatium* lib. 2. c.6). We are unwilling to dispute about words, but we do not admit the term fate, both because it is of the class which Paul teaches us to shun, as profane novelties (I Tim. 6. 20), and also because it is attempted, by means of an odious term, to fix a stigma on the truth of God.⁷⁸

The emphasis is different from Augustine's, but what is denied and affirmed about 'fate' is very similar.

So perhaps it is with such help from Augustine that Calvin adopts the Bishop of Hippo's *via media* between Stoic fatalism and the denial of divine foreknowledge which Cicero (in his own person at this point, in his *De Divinitatione*, and not as an expositor of Stoicism) contends for. In his argument Augustine also provides us with evidence of his understanding of human freedom.

If the choice is between fatalism and the denial of the knowledge of the future, Augustine makes it plain where his sympathies lie. 'But for all that, their opinion is more tolerable, that ascribe a fate unto the stars, than his, that rejects all foreknowledge of things to come.'⁷⁹ This assertion is made after Augustine has taken several chapters to oppose and ridicule astrological fatalism. The impression that Calvin's response to Stoic ideas relies on Augustine is strengthened by noting that he follows Augustine in his negative

⁷⁷ Augustine, *City of God*, ed. R. V. G. Tasker (London: Dent, 1945), V.9.153 4.

⁷⁸ *Inst.* I.16.8. ⁷⁹ *City of God*, V.9.151 2.

estimate of astrological divination, using the same scriptural counter-instance of the sharply different destinies of the twins Jacob and Esau.⁸⁰ But we also need to look at some of the details of Augustine's handling of Stoicism.

Augustine resists truncating divine foreknowledge in the interests of preserving human freedom. The two are compatible:

But howsoever the philosophers wind themselves in webs of disputations, we, as we confess the great and true God, so do we acknowledge His high will, power, and foreknowledge. Nor let us fear that we do not perform all our actions by our own will, because He, whose foreknowledge cannot err, knew before that we should do thus or thus.⁸¹

Divine foreknowledge based upon supreme power does not eliminate the human will, or make it a phantom. The will has real causal efficacy. Against the arguments of Cicero (in *De Divinitatione*) that if there is free will there cannot be an order of causes foreknown by God, Augustine asserts, 'God doth both know all things ere they come to pass, and we do all things willingly, which we do not feel ourselves and know ourselves directly enforced to.'⁸²

But this is not fatalism. Augustine stresses that what he refers to as an 'order of causes', a Stoic idea, is a part of providence:

But it does not follow that nothing should be left free to our will, because God knows the certain and set order of all events. For our very wills are in that order of causes, which God knows so surely and hath in His prescience; human wills being the cause of human actions: so that He that keeps a knowledge of the causes of all things, cannot leave men's wills out of that knowledge, knowing them to be the causes of their actions.⁸³

Having referred to various orders of causes, and the distinction between material and efficient causes, and that between power and will, Augustine writes:

How then can that set order of causes in God's foreknowledge deprive our wills of power, seeing our wills bear such a sway amongst the very causes themselves? . . . And therefore our wills are of as much power as God would have them, and knew before that they should be; and the power that they have is theirs free, to do what they shall do truly and freely; because He foreknew that they should have this power, and do these acts, whose foreknowledge cannot be deceived.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Calvin, *Warning Against Judicial Astrology*, 10; Augustine, *City of God*, V.1 8.

⁸¹ *City of God*, V.9.152.

⁸² *City of God*, V.9.153.

⁸³ *City of God*, V.9.153.

⁸⁴ *City of God*, V.9.154.

He proceeds to argue that the sense of necessity in which things happen willy-nilly, beyond our power, like dying, is to be distinguished from that sense in which the will necessarily acts as a will, freely, but still necessitated:

Nor need we fear that necessity which the Stoics were so afraid of, that in their distinctions of causes, they put some under necessity and some not under it; and in those that they did not subject unto it they put our wills also, lest they should lose their freedom by being subject to necessity.⁸⁵

So when we say that if we will anything, we must of necessity will it with a freedom of will, that is true: and we do not put our will under any such necessity as deprives it of the freedom. So that our wills are ours, willing what we will; and if we will it not, neither do they will it; and if any man suffer anything by the will of another against his own will, his will has its own power still, and his sufferance comes rather from the power of God than from his own will.⁸⁶

That is, the will shows its presence by suffering when overridden by a force that is more powerful; in Stoic terms, a case of external causation. So Augustine adopts an essentially Stoic view of the will, making use of the distinction between what is external to the will, calling it 'necessary' and denying that it is comparable with freedom, and what is internal to it. He also highlights the causal order in which wills are efficient causes, and distinguishes it from what he understands to be Stoic fate. Rejecting Stoic materialism, he transposes this account into a Christian theistic framework, that of the creator of all natures, the bestower of all powers, among which is the power to will, and who by his foreknowledge knows all that will occur, including the willings of his creatures.

As we have already seen, like Augustine, Calvin substitutes God for the Stoic immanent causal order. (However, unlike Augustine, he does not favour the expression 'free will', for reasons already rehearsed.) The same problems about chance and responsibility are faced, as with Augustine, together with similar responses. And Calvin, like Augustine, sees his account of divine providence as travelling along a middle way between fortune and fortuitousness, Epicureanism, on the one hand, and 'Stoic fate' on the other.

One reason that Calvin might be initially sympathetic to fatalism is to do with the Stoic gods' necessitation of events and their consequent foreknowledge of them:⁸⁷

For we do not talk foolishly about an intricacy of connected causes with the Stoics, or subject the government of the world to the stars, or invent a necessity in

⁸⁵ *City of God*, V.10.155 another reference, perhaps, to argument T2 discussed by Salles.

⁸⁶ *City of God*, V.10.155. ⁸⁷ Salles 27 n. 28.

the very nature of things; but that, of course, is what profane men call ‘fate’. The predestination of God is, therefore, quite a different thing from fate.⁸⁸

Though some Stoics seem to have steered clear of astrological fatalism, others (Augustine mentions Posidonius⁸⁹) were attracted by it. Of course, the stars might play an epistemic rather than a causal role. Nevertheless, we see here that the heart of Augustine’s objection to the Stoics is theological.

CALVIN ON COMPATIBILISM AND HARD DETERMINISM

In the course of the previous discussion we established that, in general terms, Calvin is a compatibilist, holding that non-libertarianism is compatible with moral responsibility. In this section we will probe further the nature of this compatibilism, particularly its relationship to his view of grace and merit. As we have noted, Calvin is scathing about those who, with an eye to his no-risk view of providence, hold that such a view cancels moral responsibility so that crimes are virtues.⁹⁰ The view of Calvin that one gets from collating what he himself says on the various topics just discussed is that men and women are to be held responsible when they act in an uncoerced way, expressing in their actions their beliefs and desires. They are to be praised when they do well, blamed when they do ill, in standard compatibilist fashion. In similar fashion Calvin is at pains to answer standard anti-compatibilist claims.

At first Calvin maintains that thieves and murderers are not doing God’s will, since they are disobeying his laws. But he has to concede that ‘if he [God] did not will it, we could not do it. I admit this.’⁹¹ Nevertheless, our reason for doing evil is not to serve God or to conform to his will, but we ‘rush headlong’. That is, the uncoercible and strongly evil nature of our wills renders us culpable, notwithstanding the fact that what we do is in accordance with God’s providence.

However, there is a further element to Calvin’s overall view, what he has to say about creaturely merit, or rather about its absence, which creates a problem for any standard compatibilist understanding of Calvin’s position. Calvin disdains the idea of human merit, of praiseworthiness, even deploring the use of the term:

I willingly abstain from disputes about words, but I could wish that Christian writers had always observed this soberness—that when there was no occasion for

⁸⁸ Calvin, *Concerning Scandals* (1550), trans. John W. Fraser (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans 1978), 53.

⁸⁹ *City of God*, V.2.

⁹⁰ *Inst.* I.17.3 4.

⁹¹ *Inst.* I.17.5.

it, they had never thought of using terms foreign to the Scriptures—terms which might produce much offense, but very little fruit. I ask, what need was there to introduce the word merit, when the value of works might have been fully expressed by another term, and without offence? The quantity of offence contained in it the world shows to its great loss. It is certain that, being a high-sounding term, it can only obscure the grace of God, and inspire men with pernicious pride.⁹²

As a consequence of his rejection of the meritoriousness of good works he completely bypasses the medieval idea that in order to be meritorious faith must be a free act. He pours scorn on the idea of merit because it is at the heart of the religious abuses that he wishes to rid the Church of. Indeed, it appears that the phrase ‘creaturely merit’ is for Calvin a contradiction in terms.

Let us assume in what follows that praiseworthiness, if not equivalent in meaning to merit, is nevertheless a necessary and sufficient condition of merit; demerit, necessary and sufficient for blameworthiness. It might be thought that what follows is Calvin’s view:

- (1) Whoever in doing A sins cannot be praised for A.

and

- (2) Whoever in doing A voluntarily keeps God’s law is praiseworthy.

But these propositions do not in fact take us to the heart of Calvin’s view. As I showed in *John Calvin’s Ideas*,⁹³ for Calvin praiseworthiness and blameworthiness are not connected with keeping or breaking God’s law, but with the fact of creatureliness. According to him, being creaturely means that we could fall—or, more exactly, that we have an inherent liability to fall. And if we could fall and do not fall then what we do when we do not fall is not meritorious but is down to God’s power and goodness who prevents us from falling. What more decisively shapes the entitlement to praise and blame is creatureliness. This is of a piece with what Calvin says about divine goodness. Such goodness is creatorly, not creaturely; it is immaculate, indefectible goodness, essential to the one who has it.⁹⁴ But the necessity of the divine goodness does not mean that it is not praiseworthy, not because it is backed by an indeterministic choice, but because of its unique character and instantiation: it is the divine goodness of the Creator. So in the case of both the Creator and the creature, for Calvin their metaphysical status has more significance for

⁹² *Inst.* III.15.2.

⁹³ *John Calvin’s Ideas*, ch. 10.

⁹⁴ *Inst.* II.3.5.

their praise- and blameworthiness than do issues of human power or divine freedom or even divine ordination.

So

- (3) Whoever having an inherent liability to fall and in acting voluntarily does not fall is not praiseworthy.

and

- (4) Whoever, having an inherent liability to fall and in acting voluntarily does fall is blameworthy.

Throughout, of course, praise- and blameworthiness are here being used as terms of desert. Calvin is not saying that a person in (3) ought not to be praised in order to encourage him to continue in his path of virtue, or that a person in (4) ought not to be blamed in order to dissuade him from the path of vice on which he is treading. If there are other reasons for praising beyond what a person deserves then these fall out of consideration here, and similarly with blame. So for Calvin the fact of creatureliness imparts a rather stark asymmetry to praiseworthiness and blameworthiness.

Lurking in the background here is the question of whether ought implies can, or, more exactly, whether cannot removes ought. He certainly rejects this principle, for he holds that a person ought to keep God's law in a properly motivated way even when he cannot do so.⁹⁵ No doubt he takes this from Augustine, for it is a frequent refrain in his anti-Pelagian writings.⁹⁶ But he treats the whole question of the law of God and our attitude to it in some detail, as being a matter of independent importance, at two places in the *Institutes*, II.5.6–8 and II.7.5–6. In the first of these passages he distinguishes between two kinds of law. He considers the law's place in a variety of religious situations, and rejects the idea that we have the unaided ability to keep the law's precepts. For example, God commands what only he can enable obedience to. Thus we are commanded to convert but only God can convert.⁹⁷ We are bidden to honour God and to keep his law. But Scripture tells us that whatever righteousness we have is the gift of God. We are commanded to be strong in the Lord, not to grieve the Spirit, and so forth. But here too we cannot unaidedly fulfil what is required, and need divine assistance, for which we must pray. The point of

⁹⁵ *Inst.* II.7.5 6.

⁹⁶ e.g. *On the Spirit and the Letter*, ch. 34; *On Man's Perfection in Righteousness*, chs. 5, 19; *On the Grace of Christ and on Original Sin*, ch. 9; *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians*, ch. 10.

⁹⁷ *Inst.* II.5.8.

principle is that it does not follow that because we are commanded to do such-and-such we have the capacity to do it.⁹⁸

As with Augustine, in Calvin's view the very fact that a person ought to do what he cannot do should be pressed on him in order for him to become conscious of his inability and so (with God's enabling, of course) call on Christ for his help. This may at first seem like a pragmatic, utilitarian strategy; preach the law in order to bring people to Christ. But such a strategy could only work if a person believed that they ought to keep the law even though they could not. Such a belief may arise, for Calvin (and for Augustine), from the prior belief that the human race has been disabled through the Fall in such a way that did not exculpate. Another source is the inherent clarity of God's testimony to himself, both in nature and in Scripture.

Where matters of praise and blame are concerned, in Calvin's thought the metaphysics of creatureliness and of universal sinfulness trump the significance or importance both of the divine decree for praise and blame and of human voluntary action. For Calvin, the fact that human actions are divinely decreed does not remove the deserved praise-blame dimension, as it does in hard determinism. Nevertheless, it modifies it. For the fact that such actions are carried out voluntarily provides a necessary and perhaps sufficient condition of blameworthiness in the case of evil actions, though not of praiseworthiness in the case of the agent performing a good action. For in the case of good, praiseworthy actions the praise is due to God's grace alone.

God's all-encompassing decree establishes the occurrence of good as well as of bad creaturely actions. For Calvin, how this can be is a mystery, on which no human analogies can throw much light. However, both types of action are consistent with Calvin's overall compatibilist scheme, which is a general thesis about the nature of every human action. But for an action to be a good creaturely action it is not sufficient that it be unconstrained, voluntary, and so forth, in typical compatibilist fashion, but that it have a certain causal history, a history that has its origin and its sustaining cause in God's efficacious grace:

Accordingly, through the blessing of Christ we are renewed by that regeneration into the righteousness of God from which we had fallen through Adam, the Lord being pleased in this manner to restore the integrity of all whom he appoints to the inheritance of life. This renewal, indeed, is not accomplished in a moment, a day, or a year, but by uninterrupted, sometimes even by slow progress God

⁹⁸ *Inst.* II.5.9. At *Inst.* II.7.7 Calvin deals with the punitive function of the law.

abolishes the remains of carnal corruption in his elect, cleanses them from pollution, and consecrates them as his temples, restoring all their inclinations to real purity, so that during their whole lives they may practise repentance, and know that death is the only termination to this warfare.⁹⁹

This passage and many others show that according to Calvin for actions to be good actions they must be actions of consecration, of true repentance, each arising out of the causal sufficiency of divine grace. The actions are motivated in a way that has its cause in an efficacious input of divine, unmerited goodness, sufficient to properly motivate right actions.

In modern discussions of free will and determinism great attention is paid to the significance of the causal genesis of an action, to what Derk Pereboom calls the causal-history principle.¹⁰⁰ Thus libertarians typically ground moral responsibility in an indeterministically free decision over which the person in question has decisive control; if the action stems from a factor over which the agent has no control, then that person is not responsible. By contrast, compatibilists ground responsibility in a different factor with a different causal history; the decision is not the result of causal compulsion, or a causally random event, but of a person's voluntary choice made in accordance with his unconstrained beliefs and desires and so expressive of them. As we have seen, a similar approach can be adopted to gain some understanding of Calvin; he is within the compatibilist sector, so to speak. But to appreciate the distinctiveness of his position we must make two sets of distinctions. One is between a person's being praise- or blameworthy and an action's being praise- or blameworthy. The other is his distinction between 'heavenly things' and 'earthly things'. For reasons already given, for Calvin no person is ever worthy of God's praise, though many of a person's actions may be; namely, those in whose causal history God's grace is a sufficient condition for their occurrence, or for their being well motivated. In these circumstances God is to be praised for his own grace. Strictly speaking, it is not the person who is to be praised but God, whose grace ensures the action. In the case of 'things below', God's goodness is also at work, though this time through the agencies of 'common grace', through which (*inter alia*) God places a restraining hand on the evil that fallen humankind would otherwise commit.

Imagine that a person has some freak genetic gift in virtue of which he is inordinately fond of jumping and can effortlessly jump ten feet or more in the air. Then that person does not deserve to be praised for winning the

⁹⁹ *Inst.* III,3,9.

¹⁰⁰ Derk Pereboom, *Living Without Free Will* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 54.

high-jump, even though it might be prudent to praise him to encourage him to carry on jumping. His success is due to the operation of the genetic gift. That's how it is for Calvin with God's grace, except that the causal factor is not genetic but pneumatic and moral.

So Calvin's view of human merit and demerit carries some features of hard determinism, in that a person is not to be praised for what comes in a certain causal way, but otherwise (unlike standard hard determinism) he is to be blamed if he acts voluntarily. But Calvin's position parallels hard determinism in another sense. If a person has a unique genetic gift, and then makes good use of it, we might say that her good use of it is praiseworthy even though the gift is not, even though we might compliment her on the gift itself. But neither of these obtains for Calvin's view of a good action, since both the virtue and the ability to develop it are God's gifts. It is God who is to be praised, though it seems odd to say that he 'deserves' praise. Suppose, however, that such a gifted person makes no use of her virtuous endowment, as she might make no use of a unique genetic gift. Then according to Calvin this non-use of a virtuous disposition is blameworthy, since it is due to a person's sin, which was not a gift, but the bad result of free choice.

So here's the asymmetry. In the case of responsibility before God Calvin's compatibilism gives rise to blame but never to praise. According to Calvin what a person does from a wrong/bad motive and intention the person is *inalienably* responsible for, and so deserves to be blamed for it. Whereas if a person is to be morally praised for what he does that is good the praise is *alienable* praise; that is, the source or origin of what is praiseworthy does not lie in the person, in the moral character of his desires or intentions, but in the one who is the source of these, namely God himself.

Asymmetries of an analogous kind are occasionally to be found in contemporary philosophical literature on praise and blame. So the compatibilist Susan Wolf discusses asymmetries of praise and blame that occur in what she calls the reason view of action. Wolf thinks that given determinism praise is appropriate and deserved, blame never. 'The Reason View is thus committed to the curious claim that being psychologically determined to perform good actions is compatible with deserving praise for them, but that being psychologically determined to perform bad actions is not compatible with deserving blame.'¹⁰¹ Calvin, inhabiting a somewhat darker but ultimately more hopeful world (he would believe)

¹⁰¹ Susan Wolf, *Freedom Within Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 79.

than Wolf, argues that deserved praise is never appropriate, while deserved blame is always appropriate.

Yet there is a further problem for Calvin—a problem of internal consistency, that is. As a Reformation theologian he wishes at all points to be faithful to the full range of biblical data. And he recognizes, naturally enough, that those actions which conform to the moral law, though performed out of ungracious motives, are right actions. He compliments pagan virtues: the ‘integrity’ of Aristides, Socrates, Xenosocrates, Scipio, and so forth.¹⁰² Furthermore, there are passages in the New Testament, for example in a text such as I Peter 2: 14, which appear to teach, or to imply, that good actions *are* praiseworthy: ‘Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.’ Here is part of what Calvin says in his comment on this verse:

Now he [Peter] assumes these two things, which belong, as Plato says, to a commonwealth. That is, reward to the good and punishment to the wicked; for in ancient times, not only punishment was allotted to evil-doers, but also rewards to the doers of good. But though it often happens that honours are not rightly distributed, nor rewards given to the deserving, yet it is an honour, not to be despised, that the good are at the least under the care and protection of the magistrates, that they are not exposed to the violence and injuries of the ungodly, that they live more quietly under laws and better retain their reputation, than if every one, unrestrained, lived as he pleased. In short, it is a singular blessing of God, that the wicked are not allowed to do what they like.¹⁰³

Calvin interprets the scriptural words, then, in terms of retributive praise and blame. So how can he at one and the same time argue that no creaturely act is praiseworthy, and endorse the view that evildoers are to be punished, and the doers of good are to be rewarded?

The answer may lie in the sharp distinction that he draws between ‘earthly things’ and ‘heavenly things’:

The distinction is, that we have one kind of intelligence of earthly things, and another of heavenly things. By earthly things, I mean those which relate not to God and his kingdom, to true righteousness and future blessedness, but have some connection with the present life, and are in a manner confined within its boundaries. By heavenly things, I mean the pure knowledge of God, the method of true righteousness, and the mysteries of the heavenly kingdom. To the former belong matters of policy and economy, all mechanical arts and liberal studies.

¹⁰² *Inst.* III.24.10.

¹⁰³ *Comm.* 1 Pet. 2: 14.

To the latter belong the knowledge of God and of his will, and the means of framing the life in accordance with them.¹⁰⁴

Such a distinction provides him with one way of dealing with the New Testament material about praiseworthiness. What is needed is a very sharp and rather impermeable understanding of it, such that, for example, deserved praise can never be ascribed for actions in the ‘heavenly’ realm, but praise may be appropriate for actions in the ‘earthly’ realm—such that there is a contingent connection between non-meritoriousness and praiseworthiness and meritoriousness and blameworthiness. A person may be praised for their mechanical skill, say, simply because it meets certain highish standards and has been developed at their own initiative. That is, what is typically understood as a standard compatibilist account of praise and blame might be adopted here. So a symmetrical praise and blame would apply in the case of ‘earthly things’, but not in the case of ‘heavenly things’, where the asymmetry between praise and blame that we discussed earlier would apply. The wall between the ‘heavenly’ and the ‘earthly’ realm would not, as a matter of fact, be totally impermeable, however, since, for Calvin, Jesus Christ, whose actions were supererogatory and who merited our salvation, was also a political subject whose meritorious actions were (doubtless wrongly) adjudged blameworthy by the political leadership of his time, and who suffered punishment as a consequence. And the distinction is permeable in another sense: that Christian citizens may perform actions which are done only through the strength of divine grace but which are socially and politically significant and therefore praiseworthy, in accordance with the approach of 1 Peter.

While considering divine praise and blame in the realm of heavenly things, Calvin invariably thinks in terms of desert in the case of praise and blame, not of a justification of the activities of praising and blaming in terms of reform and/or deterrence as is usual with compatibilists such as Hume and Hobbes, say, and invariable in the case of hard determinists such as Pereboom.¹⁰⁵ In the case of ‘earthly things’, however, Calvin (with one exception) places the justification of praise and blame with the preservation of civil order. So in his remarks on Romans 13, for example, God has appointed the ‘powers’ ‘for the legitimate and just government of the world’ in matters that are ‘useful to men’, and the apostle commends to us obedience to princes ‘on the ground of utility’, the utility of providing for the tranquillity of the good, and the restraint of wicked waywardness, thus securing the safety of men and women. Even tyrannies in some

¹⁰⁴ *Inst.* II.2.13.

¹⁰⁵ Pereboom 159–60.

respects uphold society, and are therefore not equivalent to anarchy.¹⁰⁶ Magistrates are to rule for the public good. These remarks certainly have a consequentialist ring to them. On a consequentialist view of praise and blame, the 'sword' functions in an action-guiding way.¹⁰⁷ In offering such guidance, what is praiseworthy is what is 'well above average', what is blameworthy is what is 'well below average'. So in 'things below' Calvin seems to adopt a broadly consequentialist view of praise and blame, an approach which would be consistent with Calvin's overall determinism, leaving 'the heart' to God. Despite this, Calvin does not altogether go down that road. In his endorsement of Romans 13: 4, with its reference to the magistrate's sword, an executor of God's wrath,¹⁰⁸ such wrath is plausibly though not necessarily to be understood as a retributive emotion.

JOHN GILL, JONATHAN EDWARDS, AND THE STOICS

Finally, we move forward to the eighteenth century, while at the same time returning to Stoicism and its congruence with and possible influence upon Reformed conceptions of human freedom and divine grace. We turn to two eighteenth-century Calvinists, John Gill (1697–1771) and Jonathan Edwards (1703–58).

An interesting piece of evidence of the seriousness with which later Calvinist writers thought about Stoicism occurs in John Gill's *The Cause of God and Truth* (1735–8). Like Calvin, Gill, a learned and able Calvinistic Baptist pastor-theologian, discusses Stoicism in connection with the Christian view of providence. He holds a straightforward compatibilist position.¹⁰⁹ Thirty or so years later, in his discussion of divine providence in *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* (1767, 1770), he engages in conversation with the Stoics again, along similar lines.

Gill's general view is that on the question of the relation of human action to divine providence Calvinists differ only nominally from some Stoics. Stoic fate plays the same role as Almighty God, yet sometimes their meaning regarding fate is not clear; they do not all speak with the same voice and yet 'it must be allowed, that there are some things said by them

¹⁰⁶ *Comm. Rom. 13: 1–4.*

¹⁰⁷ Pereboom 147–8.

¹⁰⁸ *Comm. Rom. 13: 4.*

¹⁰⁹ Richard Muller regards Gill as a Reformed Orthodox theologian – he refers to him frequently in his *Post Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*. See also his 'John Gill and the Reformed Tradition: A Study in the Reception of Protestant Orthodoxy in the Eighteenth Century', in Michael A. G. Haykin (ed.), *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697–1771)* (Leiden: Brill, 1997). Unfortunately there is no reference in this book to Gill's discussion of Stoicism or, for that matter, of Thomas Hobbes.

which have an affinity with some tenets of ours'.¹¹⁰ Compared with Calvin, Gill is much clearer and more explicit about points of agreement and disagreement, but at the same time there does not seem to have been any direct influence of the Stoics in the development of his own views. He sees them as providing support from reason for his own views derived from special revelation.¹¹¹ So, many of the arguments for fate parallel those for providence, as do the answers to objections.¹¹² For example, he endorses the idea of co-fatedness as a way of answering the objection that certain ends are fated for us whether we will them or not. No, says Gill, Chrysippus refutes this argument by his distinction between *simplicia* and *copulata*. Milo is only fated to wrestle at the Olympic games if it is also fated that he has an opponent. These things are *confatalia*, fated together, just as the Christian doctrine of election is *confatalia* with the means necessary to gain the end of election.¹¹³ Gill also approves of the way in which the Stoics answer the objection that fate makes God the author of sin; namely, by distinguishing between different kinds of causes, just as the stone rolls downhill not only because it is pushed, but because of its own 'volubility'.¹¹⁴ But he also points out that some Stoics endorse astrological fate, and think of fate as distinct from God, as when Seneca says that the same fate binds God and man; and, as one would expect, here he dissents from them, as we have seen that Calvin also did, following Augustine, whom Gill cites at some length.¹¹⁵

Of particular interest is Gill's identification of a precise question which Ricardo Salles discusses; namely, whether Chrysippus held to a true determinism, or sought to interpret acts of assent indeterministically.¹¹⁶ Here is what Gill says:

Some of them [the Stoics] were very careful to preserve the natural liberty of the will of man, as we are. Chrysippus, one of the principal among them [Gill cites Cicero *de Fato*] was of opinion, that 'the mind was free from the necessity of motion', which, in this case he disapproved of; and though it was his sentiment,

¹¹⁰ *The Cause of God and Truth* (1735 70; London, Tegg, 1838), 352.

¹¹¹ *Cause of God and Truth*, 352.

¹¹² *Cause of God and Truth*, 354.

¹¹³ *Cause of God and Truth*, 353 4.

¹¹⁴ *Cause of God and Truth*, 355.

¹¹⁵ *Cause of God and Truth*, 357.

¹¹⁶ This indeterminism is stated by Salles (p. 68) to be the view attributed to Chrysippus by some modern scholars – the belief that 'in spite of determinism, an individual action may be contingent in a sense that the agent may either perform it or not at a specific time'; that is, has the freedom to do otherwise (p. 69). As we have seen, Bobzien is more sympathetic to a compatibilist interpretation of Chrysippus.

that nothing happened without preceding causes, yet, that he might escape necessity, and retain fate, he distinguished causes: some of them, he said, were *perfectae et principales*; others, *adjuvantes et proximae*.¹¹⁷

This appears to be the argument T2 which Salles identifies and discusses, and accepts as not explicitly Chrysippean but as virtually present in his Stoicism.¹¹⁸ Salles expresses the view that this Chrysippean power to do otherwise is consistent with everything factual being causally necessary, and in any case Salles believes that it is not intended to specify a necessary condition for responsibility.¹¹⁹ Gill thinks that such refinement by some Stoics (such as Chrysippus) into different types of causation doesn't work as a device to preserve fate and escape necessity in the case of human actions. It is not sufficient to do this, but in any case (he believes) the project is unnecessary. Gill straightforwardly maintains that Stoic fate, like Christian providence, entails causal necessity, and all that specifying the different kinds of causation does is to identify different kinds of such necessity.¹²⁰ He seems to say little on the distinction between internal and external causation, but there is no doubt that he recognizes it, as his earlier discussion of Thomas Hobbes indicates.¹²¹

So Gill has an informed and sophisticated understanding of Stoicism. In the main he sees the Stoics as allies rather than as sources. He never considers that similarities between his Calvinism and Stoic argumentation might indicate influence, but merely endorses Jerome's view that 'in most things they agree with us'.¹²² As far as I can see he nowhere mentions Calvin in his discussions of Stoicism.

What of Gill's American contemporary Jonathan Edwards?

However the term 'Calvinist' is in these days, among most, a term of greater reproach than the term 'Arminian'; yet I should not take it at all amiss, to be called a Calvinist, for distinction's sake: though I utterly disclaim a dependence on Calvin, or believing the doctrines which I hold, because he believed and taught them; and cannot justly be charged with believing everything just as he taught.¹²³

Indeed not. Jonathan Edwards had considerable independence of mind, and there is little or no evidence that he ever cited John Calvin directly.

¹¹⁷ *Cause of God and Truth*, 353. (See Salles 42 for the Ciceronian source of this distinction.)

¹¹⁸ Salles 70. See the parallel discussion at Bobzien 277.

¹¹⁹ Salles 88.

¹²⁰ *The Cause of God and Truth*, 353 4.

¹²¹ *The Cause of God and Truth*, 345 6.

¹²² Cited at *The Cause of God and Truth*, 351.

¹²³ *The Freedom of the Will* (1754), ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1957), 131.

Between Calvin and Jonathan Edwards there is nearly two hundred years, plenty of time for new influences to exert themselves, and in Edwards's case there is good reason to think that they did. The influence of Locke on him has been well documented, and is very evident in the opening sections of his *Freedom of the Will*. Like his contemporary Gill, Edwards lived in a post-Lockean, post-Newtonian world, but unlike Gill he was very aware of this. However, he was also a 'Calvinist', as he tells us, not ashamed of the label, though deriving his theology less from Calvin himself than from a team of Puritan and Reformed Orthodox authors. Yet if all one read of Edwards was his book on freedom one would not gather as much. The argument of the book is not one from authority, but a 'strict inquiry' of a philosophical nature, along deterministic, compatibilist lines. He was aiming to attract a European, 'enlightened' readership, and Locke and Hobbes and Lord Kames are mentioned to the almost total exclusion of authors from his Reformed background, Peter van Mastricht, or John Owen, or Thomas Shepherd, say.

Compared with what we have discovered in Calvin (and what is also true of scholastically influenced Reformed theologians after Calvin, such as Gill), Edwards's arguments have a decidedly non-scholastic character, for the influence of Locke on him had borne fruit.¹²⁴ The distinction between primary and secondary causation hardly figures, divine permission not at all. Edwards is not interested in a hierarchy of distinct created 'natures'. Instead he is concerned with the logic of causation, especially of its universality, utilizing the basic principle that every event has a cause. And though he abandons anything resembling the Aristotelian fourfold causation, yet his idea of causation is very flexible, and is compatible with occasionalism, an occasionalism which in Edwards's case did not arise (as it did in the case of Malebranche, for example) from difficulties over accounting for the relationship of soul and body, but from a strong doctrine of divine sovereignty:

Therefore I sometime use the word 'cause', in this inquiry, to signify any antecedent, either natural or moral, positive or negative, on which an event, either a thing, or the manner and circumstance of a thing, so depends, that it is the ground and reason, either in whole, or in part, why it is, rather than not; or why it is as it is rather than otherwise; or, in other words, any antecedent with which a consequent is so connected, that it truly belongs to the reason why the proposition which affirms that event, is true; whether it has any positive influence, or not. And in an agreeableness to this, I sometimes use the word 'effect' for the

¹²⁴ For Edwards's explicit indebtedness to Locke on the will see *Freedom of the Will*, pt. II.1.

consequence of another thing, which is perhaps rather an occasion than a cause, most properly speaking. . . Having thus explained what I mean by cause, I assert, that nothing ever comes to pass without a cause.¹²⁵

Here and elsewhere he pays a good bit of attention to the distinction between what he calls moral and natural necessity, fairly new terminology.¹²⁶ He is not overly worried by the charge that given determinism God is the author of sin, provided that that phrase is properly understood.¹²⁷

So the created universe is a much flatter, more uniform place for Edwards than it was for Calvin. It is at all points subject to law, the law of universal causation, that in turn is subject to the divine decree; indeed, it is an expression of the divine decree; indeed, if one stresses the occasionalistic side of Edwards, it *is* the divine decree.¹²⁸ Edwards's determinism is as a consequence much more developed and avowed than that of Calvin or even of Calvin's Reformed Orthodox successors such as Gill. Of course his aims are utterly congruent with Calvinism, but (in this work at least) he aims to argue philosophically against Arminianism, to hold it up to the ridicule of reason, to show its incoherence, rather than to appeal to the letter and spirit of Holy Scripture, except for matters of theological fact such as the extent of God's foreknowledge and the occasional *argumentum ad hominem* from Scripture against the Arminians.¹²⁹

However, there is one interesting area of overlap, if not of continuity, between Edwards and Calvin and the Reformed Orthodox: Edwards's attitude to fate and to the Stoics. Calvin, as we have seen, uses Stoic ideas without telling us that he is doing so, while carefully distinguishing his position from 'Stoic fate'. Somewhat like Gill, Edwards comes clean. Although he does not derive any anti-Arminian arguments directly from the Stoics, he is perfectly happy to agree with them, and (again like Gill) to agree even with Thomas Hobbes¹³⁰ on the subject of fate.¹³¹

¹²⁵ *Freedom of the Will*, 180. 1. On Edwards's occasionalism see Oliver Crisp, 'How "Occasional" was Edwards's Occasionalism?', in Paul Helm and Oliver D. Crisp (eds.), *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

¹²⁶ *Freedom of the Will*, pt. I.4.

¹²⁷ *Freedom of the Will*, 398–9.

¹²⁸ Crisp, 69.

¹²⁹ *Freedom of the Will*, pt. II.2.

¹³⁰ 'I confess, it happens that I never read Mr Hobbes' (*Freedom of the Will*, 374). As we have noted, Gill had, and discusses him in *The Cause of God and Truth* (344–5), which Edwards knew (*Freedom of the Will*, 374).

¹³¹ Gill, like Edwards an opponent of the Arminian Daniel Whitby, might be an intermediary influence here. As we have seen, Gill adopts a similar attitude to that of Edwards: 'Truth is truth, let it drop from what mouth or pen soever' (*Cause of God and Truth*, 344).

Edwards's absorption of the Locke–Newton world is borne out in his account of human action. He sees human desires and volitions as instances of universal causation; there can be no event without a cause, and so no human volition without a cause.¹³² This is supported by his lack of interest in Stoic or Aristotelian accounts of causation and agency and in the hierarchism that they imply. In this he differs from his contemporary John Gill, but lives in the old world, and so retains an interest in accounts of Stoic agency, though critical of them.

Part IV of *The Freedom of the Will* is in effect devoted to objections, actual and anticipated, from the Arminian side. One standard objection (as we have seen) is that Calvinism is indistinguishable from Stoic fate and from Hobbesianism. In part IV, section 6 of *The Freedom of the Will* Edwards considers this objection head-on.¹³³ Edwards notes that in fact the Arminian Daniel Whitby (1638–1726) also appeals to the Stoics when it suits him to do so, and goes on to claim, reasonably enough, that what matters is truth, not coincidence of view. It is no more an argument against Calvinism that it coincides with Stoicism than it is against Arminianism that it coincides with Epicureanism or with the Jesuits.¹³⁴ He underlines the fact that the *Strict Inquiry* is a work in philosophy, and not an appeal to precedent and the authorities, by, in effect, putting the ball back in the court of those who make this objection. 'If the Stoics by fate mean x, y and z, which I don't hold, then so much the worse for them; if they mean a, b and c, which I think there are good reasons to hold, then call me a Stoic if you wish.'

In fact Edwards thinks that there are five possible ways in which his view may differ from that of the Stoics. But he deliberately puts the points hypothetically. Let us consider each of these in turn.

First, '[i]f any of 'em held such a fate, as is repugnant to any liberty consisting in our doing as we please, I utterly deny such a fate'.¹³⁵ Here Edwards affirms the compatibilism that he develops and defends throughout his book. Liberty is to be contrasted with compulsion.¹³⁶ If a person does as he or she pleases, then they are free. Is that fate? Second, if what they call fate is inconsistent with 'common and universal notions that mankind have of liberty, activity, moral agency, virtue and vice; I disclaim any such thing'.¹³⁷ This harks back to part I of the book, in which Edwards had made a Locke-inspired appeal to 'what we ordinarily mean' by such terms, a move which is crucial to the philosophical character of his defence

¹³² *Freedom of the Will*, pt. II.3, 4.

¹³⁴ *Freedom of the Will*, 373.

¹³⁶ *Freedom of the Will*, 359–61.

¹³³ *Freedom of the Will*, 372.

¹³⁵ *Freedom of the Will*, 373.

¹³⁷ *Freedom of the Will*, 373.

of compatibilism, and also to his appeal to common sense and common usage as part of his overall apologetic for compatibilism. Third:

If the Stoics by fate meant anything of such a nature, as can be supposed to stand in the way of the advantage and benefit of the use of means and endeavours, or makes it less worth the while for men to desire, and seek after anything wherein their virtue and happiness consists; I hold no doctrine that is clogged with any such inconvenience.¹³⁸

That is, Edwardsian ‘fate’ does not fall prey to the ‘lazy argument’. If I want to get from here to there I ought not to resign myself to fate, and to fold my arms, but to use an appropriate means of locomotion to get there. Fourth:

If they held any such doctrine of universal fatality, as is inconsistent with any kind of liberty, that is or can be any perfection, dignity, privilege or benefit, or anything desirable, in any respect, for any intelligent creature, or indeed with any liberty that is possible or conceivable; I embrace no such doctrine.¹³⁹

Here, I think, Edwards is enlarging on the second point; the reference is not now restricted to ‘common and universal notions’ of liberty, but extended to any notions of liberty that are consistent. Finally:

If they held any such doctrine of fate as is inconsistent with the world’s being in all things subject to the disposal of an intelligent wise agent, that presides, not as the soul of the world, but as the sovereign Lord of the universe, governing all things by proper will, choice and design, in the exercise of the most perfect liberty conceivable, without subjection to any constraint, or being properly under the power or influence of anything before, above or without himself; I wholly renounce any such doctrine.¹⁴⁰

This is the only strictly theological caveat that Edwards enters. To be acceptable to him, the ‘fate’ in question has to be consistent with his theism: the governor of all things must not be an immanent force, a world-soul, but the ‘sovereign Lord’, unconstrained by anything (such as the courses of the stars) and most perfectly free. (Free, that is, in Edwards’s understanding of freedom; for him, not even God could have a liberty of indifference, since Edwards holds that such freedom is logically incoherent.)

In a separate, brief discussion Edwards accuses the Arminians, for whom God’s will is subject to his own foreknowledge, and his

¹³⁸ *Freedom of the Will*, 373.

¹³⁹ *Freedom of the Will*, 374.

¹⁴⁰ *Freedom of the Will*, 374.

foreknowledge is subject to the libertarian free decisions of humankind, of having a doctrine that is

much more agreeable to the notion which many of the heathen had of fate, as above the gods, than that necessity of fitness and wisdom which has been spoken of; and is truly repugnant to the absolute sovereignty of God, and inconsistent with the supremacy of his will; and really subjects the will of the most High to the will of his creatures, and brings him into dependence upon them.¹⁴¹

As we spell out what Edwards regards as an acceptable sense of ‘fate’ and what as not, we find ourselves coming full circle. Calvin would not see an advantage in appealing to ‘common notions’ or ‘the ‘reasonable man’; he would see danger in that. Also, while avowing divine freedom Calvin does not develop this in terms of the debate about determinism and indeterminism. Edwards himself certainly has a doctrine of divine incomprehensibility, but at this point Calvin’s is the stronger. Nonetheless, of course, Calvin’s ‘fate’, as Augustine’s, is equivalent to the rule of the transcendent God.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this chapter I argued that from a strictly logical point of view Calvin’s doctrine of the bondage of the will to sin could be combined with an indeterministic view of human action, provided that a distinction was drawn between action types and action tokens.¹⁴² This is possible because in Calvin compatibilism is not avowed in the way it is in Gill’s case and even more so in the case of Edwards. Calvin’s compatibilism has to be pieced together from various strands of evidence. In Gill’s and Edwards’s case causal determinism is avowed, and with it the distinction between voluntariness and compulsion, even though (because of Edwards’s extremely strong view of divine sovereignty) that determinism is of a somewhat occasionalistic hue. In Edwards’s case moral and spiritual freedom and bondage is worked out in the distinction he draws between natural and moral ability and inability.¹⁴³ Moral inability is due to bias or inclination, while natural inability is due solely to a lack of physical power and opportunity. So a virtuous person may have the power and opportunity to commit adultery but be unable to bring themselves to do so. Such power and opportunity may be present and yet a person may be unable to

¹⁴¹ *Freedom of the Will*, 396.

¹⁴² See also Helm, *John Calvin’s Ideas*, ch. 6.

¹⁴³ *Freedom of the Will*, pt. I.4.

act immorally. Similarly a rogue may have the opportunity to be honest and yet continue to double-deal.

It may be that in Calvin's case he is directly or indirectly indebted to the Stoics for the way in which his ideas are formulated. Certainly, with his heavy dependence on Augustine, and his Renaissance learning, he is very much a part of the ancient world in which Stoics and Epicureans were conversation partners. Gill and Edwards occupy the modern world, but even so the Stoics were useful allies provided that their views were appropriated with care.

Intermediate States

IN this chapter we will examine aspects of the metaphysics of the human person that Calvin is committed to as a consequence of his vehement opposition to ‘soul sleep’. This is the idea that in the intermediate state between death and resurrection the soul is anaesthetized until the resurrection. In order to set his view in relief we will contrast it with that of his fellow Reformer Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562). For Martyr was, philosophically speaking, an Aristotelian, while Calvin, at least as regards the relation between body and soul, was something of a Platonist. There is no evidence, as far as I know, however, that the two of them discussed their views on these issues together in the way that they discussed the idea of union with Christ.

Following this we will examine Calvin’s view of another ‘intermediate state’: Christ’s state between his ascension and return in the context of his particular understanding of the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

CALVIN’S DUALISM

Calvin’s thought is characterized by a strong mind–body dualism, to which he seems to have held throughout his life. Man consists of a body and a soul, and the two are parts of one whole, the soul being the ‘nobler part’, but the relationship between these is *de facto*, for Calvin proceeds to refer to the soul as an essence—that is, an individual thing in its own right, an individual ‘created essence’ which is ‘some kind of essence separated from the body’, the ‘principal part’ of man.¹ In characteristically dualist fashion Calvin writes of the soul as a different kind of thing from the body, having powers, such as intellectual activity and memory, which in his view it is impossible for a mere body to possess. Calvin, though clearly indebted to Aristotle for certain matters, never says or implies, as far as I am aware, that the soul needs the body, and he scorns the idea of the soul being diffused throughout the body²—his way of expressing the hylomorphism

¹ *Inst.* I.15.2.

² *Inst.* I.15.2.

of Aristotle, no doubt. He certainly never uses the language of form and matter to characterize the human person.

Early on there is evidence of a rather crude dualism. For instance, in his *Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia* he refers to the human soul as 'something tiny and miniscule'.³ In the *Institutes* there is a strong affirmation of the soul's immortality and the evidences for this from nature and Scripture. He makes the point that although a man may be mortal, it does not follow that every part of man is mortal.⁴ Later on Calvin makes it clear that the soul occupies no space.⁵ But in calling Calvin's view 'dualistic' it needs to be borne in mind that his dualism mainly has a metaphysical and not an ethical character. Calvin does not think of the body as the source of evil, in ethical conflict with the soul, though occasionally, as we will see, he writes to the effect that the sinful body, the 'flesh' in one sense of that term, makes emancipation from sin more difficult. This is one of the reasons that he repeatedly refers to the body as (in Plato's phrase) the 'prison house' of the soul, though it cannot be the only reason. For he believes that the Logos united with sinless human nature, and yet on occasion refers to the Incarnation as Christ similarly occupying the 'prison house' of the flesh. He is wary of any suggestion of Manichaeism. An original ethical dualism, rooted in the creation, is ruled out as a matter of fundamental principle, simply because Calvin recognized the human body as a divine creation, created good. Yet while he was not an out-and-out ethical dualist, who would hold that there is some principled ethical opposition between spirit and matter, he nonetheless believed that the body is inferior to the mind because unlike the mind or soul it is not immortal. A body is what human beings have in common with non-human animals; the soul was divinely breathed into the body as part of the process of creating mankind in the image of God. So he tended to think, in hierarchical fashion, that though the body was created good and while it is, like the mind, corrupted by sin, being mortal it is destined to die and to be separated from the soul, though also destined eventually to be reunited with it by divine power in the resurrection.

In his early work *Psychopannychia* (1542) he writes that the soul consists in sense and understanding,⁶ or sense and intellect. Sense here is roughly

³ *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia* (1532), trans. with an introd. and notes Ford Lewis Battles and André Malan Hugo (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 90.

⁴ *Inst.* I.15.3.

⁵ *Inst.* III.25.6.

⁶ *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, ed. Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1983), iii. 420, 427.

equivalent to consciousness or awareness. In the *Institutes* he writes somewhat ambivalently of philosophical accounts of the soul. On the one hand he praises Plato and Aristotle for their lofty talk and their acuteness, while at the same time he claims that it is vain to ask them what the soul is and where it comes from. His reserve here may simply refer to his belief that the ancient philosophers know nothing of mankind's creation in the image of God. He makes statements such as this: 'Seeing, then, that the soul of man possesses reason, intellect, and will—qualities which are not annexed to the body—it is not wonderful that it subsists without the body, and does not perish like the brutes, which have nothing more than their bodily senses.'⁷ And, more comprehensively, he states:

This soul, however, though for a time it actuates and sustains the bodily mass, does not impart to it immortality or incorruption, and as long even as it exerts its own energy; it is not sufficient by itself, without the auxiliaries of food, drink, sleep, which are the signs of corruption; nor does it maintain it in a constant and uniform state without being subject to various kinds of inclinations. But when Christ shall have received us into his own glory, not only will the animal body be quickened by the soul, but made spiritual in a manner which our mind can neither comprehend nor our tongue express. You see then, that in the Resurrection we shall be not a *different thing*, but a *different person*, (pardon the expression). These things have been said of the body, to which the soul ministers life under the elements of this world. But when the fashion of this world shall have passed away, participation in the glory of God will exalt it above nature.⁸

A different person, presumably, in the way in which someone is said to be a different person after two weeks on the Costa Brava. Subsequently, in the later editions of the *Institutes* for example, he (usually) stressed that Paul's reference to the 'flesh' in his account of sin stands not for a sinful body in contrast to a sinful soul, but for the entire human person, body and soul, made 'fleshly' in the Fall. But it is not altogether clear that this is Calvin's view of Paul at the time of the *Psychopannychia*: 'He no doubt calls the body the mass of sin, which resides in man from the native property of the flesh; and the spirit the part of man spiritually regenerated.'⁹ And in his *Treatise Against the Libertines* (1545), for example, he sometimes depicts the Pauline conflict between flesh and spirit as one between body and soul. Commenting on Romans 7: 18 he writes: 'In so doing he indicates that

⁷ *Selected Works*, iii. 451.

⁸ *Selected Works*, iii. 451 2. He cites Augustine in support.

⁹ *Selected Works*, iii. 439 40.

there is no other means of being put into a state of perfection and of being rescued from the bondage of sin except in departing from his body, where he was held captive as in a prison',¹⁰ though this is not Calvin's usual view.

As we have noted, Calvin often used Platonic language to characterize the body, repeatedly calling it a 'prison house'.¹¹ He would never have dreamt of using such language to describe the human mind, even when it is considered in its fallen state. But it would be an exaggeration to use these expressions as evidence of a full-dress Platonism. There is no suggestion of a pre-embodied existence of the soul, and he is a resolute upholder of the biblical and especially the Pauline doctrine of the resurrection of the body. It would, I believe, be more faithful to Calvin to understand this use of Platonic language as his own vivid way of referring to the biblical description of the body as a 'tabernacle'.¹² A favourite text is the reference in Job 4: 19 to 'houses of clay': 'For what is our bodie? What foundation hath it? What firmnesse soever seemeth too be in it: there needes but one little shoure of raine to washe it quite away.'¹³ In his *Commentary* on 2 Corinthians 5: 1, where Paul refers to his body as a 'tabernacle' (Calvin refers to it in French as *luge*: 'hut'), he draws the inference that the believers know that 'they are here shut up in the body as in a prison'.¹⁴

His fondness for 'prison house' may also have an autobiographical source, as in these evidently heart-felt expressions:

For if we reflect that this our tabernacle, unstable, defective, corruptible, fading, pining and putrid, is dissolved, in order that it may forthwith be renewed in sure, perfect, incorruptible, in fine, in heavenly glory, will not faith compel us eagerly to desire what nature dreads?¹⁵

Through excessive study and the effects of malnutrition, for much of his adult life Calvin was afflicted by numerous illnesses, which had a near-crippling effect on him. But if this is consciously autobiographical, it is

¹⁰ *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines* (1544, 1545), trans. and ed. B. W. Farley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1982), 267–8.

¹¹ The phrase is from Plato's *Phaedo*. There are numerous references to the body as a prison in the *Institutes* (e.g. II.2.19: 'bound with the fetters of an earthly body'; III.9.4: 'a prison'; III.25.1: 'imprisoned in the body'; 'prison house'; III.25.6: 'a tabernacle'; IV.17.30: 'the prison of the body').

¹² 2 Pet. 1: 13; 2 Cor. 5: 1.

¹³ *Sermons of Maister John Calvin, upon the Book of Job*, trans. Arthur Golding (London, 1574; repr. in facsimile, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1993), 73.

¹⁴ *Comm.* 2 Cor. 5: 1.

¹⁵ *Inst.* III.9.5.

extremely unusual for Calvin to bring himself into theological exposition.¹⁶

In the *Institutes* he has more to say about the inadequacy of philosophical discussions of the soul. ‘In ancient times philosophers discoursed, and even debated with each other, concerning the chief good; none, however, except Plato acknowledged that it consisted in union with God. He could not, however, form even an imperfect idea of its true nature.’¹⁷ ‘And hence, while many of the philosophers maintained the immortality of the soul, few of them assented to the resurrection of the body. Although in this they were inexcusable, we are thereby reminded that the subject is too difficult for human apprehension to reach it.’¹⁸ This mention of the resurrection of the body is probably a reference to the ancient belief in transmigration of the soul, whether or not the idea was held by Plato.

Moreover, to pry curiously into their intermediate state is neither lawful nor expedient. Many greatly torment themselves with discussing what place they occupy, and whether or not they already enjoy celestial glory. It is foolish and rash to enquire into hidden things, farther than God permits us to know. . . . As to the place of abode, the question is not less futile and inept, since we know that the dimension of the soul is not the same as that of the body.¹⁹

Such dualism informs his Christology, as it did that of the early Church, and he draws Christological comparisons between Christ’s two natures and the union of soul and body:²⁰

Our spirit is the image of God, like whom it lives, understands, and is eternal. As long as it is in the body it exerts its own powers; but when it quits this prison-house it returns to God, whose presence it meanwhile enjoys while it rests in the hope of a blessed Resurrection.²¹

So one should not conclude that Calvin’s use of Plato’s imagery is (in his view) without precedent in the New Testament. Usually it may be taken to be a reference to the body as fallen, and Calvin may be intimating a view which sees the resurrected body as more expansive, not at all like a prison, or even like a tent. So that there is no fundamental polarization between

¹⁶ See the fascinating account in John Wilkinson, *The Medical History of the Reformers: Luther, Calvin and John Knox* (Edinburgh: Handsel, 2001). Note also Calvin’s letter to the physicians of Montpellier, 8 February 1564, in *Selected Works*, iv. 358.

¹⁷ *Inst.* III.25.2.

¹⁸ *Inst.* III.25.3; see also III.25.6.

¹⁹ *Inst.* III.25.6.

²⁰ e.g. *Inst.* II.14.1. See Paul Helm, *John Calvin’s Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 83–4.

²¹ *Selected Works*, iii. 449.

soul and body as created, and little polarization in the case of soul and body as fallen.

Well, not usually. But there are passages where Calvin discusses the life after death as if it consisted in the enjoyment of disembodiment:

The body, which decays, weighs down the soul, and confining it within an earthly habitation, greatly limits its perceptions. If the body is the prison of the soul, if the earthly habitation is a kind of fetters, what is the state of the soul when set free from this prison, when loosed from these fetters? Is it not restored to itself, and as it were made complete, so that we may truly say, that all which it gains is so much lost to the body? Whether they will or not, they must be forced to confess, that when we put off the load of the body, the war between the spirit and the flesh ceases. In short, the mortification of the flesh is the quickening of the spirit. Then the soul, set free from impurities, is truly spiritual, so as to be in accordance with the will of God, and not subject to the tyranny of the flesh, rebelling against it.²²

To interpret such passages sympathetically to Calvin's avowed commitment to the resurrection of the body, and not as an aberration, it is best to think of his entire argument against soul sleep as having as a premise a proposition about the trajectory of a person's redemption. The beginnings of the new life, regeneration, have their end in the soul's glorification. So it would be an unnatural and inexplicable interruption of this trajectory if the soul were to undergo a period of anaesthesia at the death of the body. The logic of the trajectory, which Calvin later expounds by means of the (for him) key New Testament idea of union with Christ, would be disrupted if there were a period of sleep. In fact in his *Treatise Against The Anabaptists* he makes the point about union with Christ explicit:

It is quite easy to see that the Anabaptists have never fathomed how we are united with our Lord Jesus. For this single principle is enough to reverse their false and pernicious opinion with regard to the fantastic sleep which they attribute to souls. For to the contrary we see the conclusion that Saint Paul deduces when he says that we are already citizens of heaven, 'being made to sit in heavenly places with our Lord Jesus'. (Eph. 2:6; Phil. 3:20)²³

For a similar reason Calvin insists that the post-mortem life of believers is only a 'stage', not to be thought of as equivalent to beatitude, which involves the resurrection of the body.²⁴ In the divine wisdom the death of the body coincides with the emancipation of the soul from sin, its being made morally perfect, but its being made perfect does not consist in the

²² *Selected Works*, iii. 443.

²³ *Against the Anabaptists*, 134 5.

²⁴ *Against the Anabaptists*, 146 7.

loss of the body—though sometimes, taking an isolated passage, it does seem as if Calvin thinks that the loss of the body is essential to spiritual perfection. In any case the argument from union with Christ is not, by itself, very strong, any more than is the claim that any period of dreamless sleep interrupts a believer's union with Christ.

In his discussion of the significance of Calvin's *Psychopannychia*²⁵ George Tavard places Calvin's opposition to soul sleep and mortalism against the background of Latin Averroism, according to which the soul's immortality was denied, and the associated issue of the question of what the singularity of the soul consisted in. But given the strength of his convictions on the question, and the relative absence of philosophical interest and debate, it is more likely that what concerned Calvin was the influence of the Libertines in the early years of Reform in France.²⁶ The *Psychopannychia* (published in 1542) is best grouped with Calvin's *Treatise Against the Anabaptists* (1544) and *Treatise Against the Libertines* (1545) as expressing his concern with what he believed to be the growing influence of radical sects in France and elsewhere.²⁷ The only significant difference between the *Psychopannychia* and the slightly later anti-Libertine writings appears to be that the works against the Libertines were written by Calvin at the request of others. As regards Calvin's attitude to these sects on the topic of the soul and its post-mortem character, it has to be borne in mind that, as Calvin himself points out, while some of them were dualists, others were materialists, and still others had a pantheistic view.²⁸

So Calvin does not primarily treat the question of the status of the soul and its relation to the body as a philosophical issue, but as a distinctive tenet of some at least of these sects, a view to be refuted by the teaching of the New Testament.

Tavard also claims that when, in discussing mortalism in the *Psychopannychia*, Calvin writes of the soul animating the body²⁹ this is 'less Platonic or neoPlatonic than Aristotelian, the body and the soul relating to each other like matter and form, the two co-principles of being that were posited by Aristotle's philosophy'.³⁰ But in view of what we have seen

²⁵ *The Starting Point of Calvin's Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000). Incidentally, I concur with the assessment of Tavard's overall theological approach to the *Psychopannychia* provided by Richard Muller in his review 'The Starting Point of Calvin's Theology: An Essay Review', *Calvin Theological Journal*, 36 (2001), 314–41.

²⁶ *Starting Point*, 23, 24.

²⁷ On this influence see *Treatise against the Anabaptists*, 162–3.

²⁸ *Treatise against the Anabaptists*, 119.

²⁹ *Selected Works*, iii. 450–1.

³⁰ *Starting Point*, 88.

this seems as exaggerated as thinking of Calvin as an out-and-out Platonist. For one thing, Calvin never refers to matter and form in the *Psychopannychia*, and rarely elsewhere. If Aristotelianism in this context is simply the view that ‘the soul brings life to the ensuing compound’,³¹ then perhaps Calvin would not demur, but this is only one interpretation of Aristotle’s hylomorphism, and one that takes him to be committed to some form of dualism, since the soul is prior (logically if not temporally) to the body and therefore is distinct from it and capable of being separated from it. In view of this it is unsurprising that in the *Institutes* we find Calvin upholding the thesis that souls when they are ‘unclothed’ from the body retain their essence.³²

We must bear in mind that Calvin usually shows great discipline of mind in keeping to those issues raised by a particular context of discussion and not bringing in other issues extraneous to it. There are for him two issues, ‘He promises us two things—Eternal Life, and the Resurrection’,³³ and the two are not to be conflated; discussing the condition of one is not necessarily discussing the condition of the other. The primary point is not that those resurrected will never subsequently die, but that the soul in union with Christ can never die. ‘It will not do to say, that those who are raised do not die for ever. Our Lord meant not only this, but that it is impossible they can ever die.’³⁴ So when it comes to the question of bodily resurrection there is reticence about or relative lack of interest in the idea, at least in so far as this is measured by the amount of attention that Calvin gives to discussing the resurrection, while at the same time he is a firm believer in it.

In line with this emphasis, *Institutes* III.24 contains only a ‘brief consideration’ of the final resurrection.³⁵ It immediately follows Calvin’s discussion of election, and brings book III of the *Institutes* to a close. In effect it forms almost the entirety of Calvin’s eschatology, as well as being a commentary on the last sentence of the Apostles’ Creed. Surprisingly, perhaps, in view of his adamant opposition to soul sleep and ‘mortalism’, at this point there is no separate section on the intermediate state.³⁶ And while he affirms bodily resurrection only occasionally, when he does so it is with some feeling, as in this comment when debating ‘Nicodemism’: ‘[I]t is indecent in the extreme that bodies destined for the incorruption of

³¹ *Starting Point*, 88.

³² *Inst.* III.25.6.

³³ *Selected Works*, iii. 440.

³⁴ *Selected Works*, iii. 440.

³⁵ *Inst.* III.24.990.

³⁶ Incidentally, section 8, on burial rites, is interesting in that it is in effect an extension and application by Calvin of his views on the universal *sensus divinitatis* given in book I of the *Institutes*, though (to my knowledge) this material is hardly ever, if ever, referred to by Calvin commentators.

the kingdom of heaven should thus be defiled by foul blasphemies, to be carried into the presence of the Lord on that day when they shall stand before his Tribunal to receive the immortal crown of glory.³⁷

There is some further noteworthy evidence in support of his relative lack of interest in the resurrection of the body in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 15. He says at one point, in discussing the nature of the resurrection body:

[Paul] sums up all comprehensively in one word, by saying that the body is now *animal*, but it will then be *spiritual*. Now that is called *animal* which is quickened by (*anima*) the soul: that is *spiritual* which is quickened by the *Spirit*. Now it is the soul that quickens the body, so as to keep it from being a dead carcase. Hence it takes its title very properly from it. After the resurrection, on the other hand, that quickening influence, which it will receive from the Spirit, will be more excellent. Let us, however, always bear in mind, what we have seen previously—that the substance of the body is the same, and that it is the quality only that is here treated of. Let the present quality of the body be called, for the sake of greater plainness, *animation*; let the future receive the name of *inspiration*.³⁸

Here, as surprisingly often with Calvin, metaphysical distinctions are drawn without a great flourish, en passant. Nevertheless, they are distinctions to which he clearly attaches some value. It is a pity that he does not tell us a little more of what he has in mind. He gives us, he says, the ‘simple and genuine meaning of the Apostle; that no one may, by philosophizing farther, indulge in airy speculations, as those do, who suppose that the substance of the body will be spiritual’.³⁹ At present the soul gives life to the body, hence animation. In the case of the ‘spiritual body’ it is clear what Calvin is affirming, less clear what he is denying. The body, the very same body—Calvin, as was common, is crudely physicalist about the character of the resurrection body—which is now given life by the soul, will then have a new quality. As a result, the character of its life, of its being enlivened, will dramatically change. The source of its enlivening will no longer be the human soul but the Spirit of God, thus (as he goes on to state) exempting those who are resurrected from the necessities of nature. Perhaps he means every word—not that in the life to come bodies will be ethereal, but physical, though at the same time relieved of certain dependencies on food and drink and sleep, which at one point he says are ‘signs

³⁷ *Selected Works*, iii. 380.

³⁸ *Comm.* 1 Cor. 15: 44.

³⁹ *Comm.* 1 Cor. 15: 44.

of corruption?⁴⁰ Perhaps, like Augustine, he thinks that those having resurrected bodies *may* eat, but do not *need* to eat.⁴¹

What is of more interest to us is the metaphysical idea that the pre-mortem dualism is somehow supplanted by or enriched by a Spirit-supported dualism. Surely Calvin cannot mean that the Spirit 'takes over' and that human souls become bystanders with regard to the activities of their resurrected bodies, ceasing to have a direct causal connection with them, or having less of a causal connection? Rather, it seems more plausible to suppose that he means that the pre-mortem animation will be enriched by the Spirit's dwelling in the soul, so empowering and delivering the body from some of the limitations of its present state. So whatever *is* essential to the life of the body, sleeping, eating, and drinking are not. Perhaps in his many references to the body as a prison house he has in mind its dependence upon sleep and food as well as its liability to sickness and the embarrassments of old age. This may be another instance where Calvin, though willing to take on the language of the philosophers, in this case their anthropological language, sees them as mistaking a ruin for a building.⁴²

Probing further the nature of soul sleep to which Calvin is so opposed will give us some more help in trying to understand his dualism and how it explains the nature of the intermediate state. By 'soul sleep' he means a state of complete anaesthesia caused by or simply following the death of the body, a condition in which there is no awareness, much less self-awareness, not even in dreams. One might expect that the repeated denial of soul sleep would give rise to Calvin saying something about what soul sleep is not, but disappointingly there is very little, if any, of this. There is little development of what soul sleep might imply, and hence what, by contrast, his view of post-mortem, pre-resurrection consciousness implies. I do not think that he has out-and-out philosophical objections to the idea of soul sleep. He seems to think that it is not so much impossible as false, for he makes a distinction between the doctrine of soul sleep and another (in his eyes) equally if not more pernicious Libertine teaching, mortalism: the idea that both body and soul die at the death of the body. But what exactly is this view? That at the death of the body the soul also dies? Or is it some version of materialism, that the death of the body is the death of the soul, since the soul is the body, or part of it? We are not told. In distinguishing between the thesis of soul sleep and that of mortalism Calvin reveals that he cannot be committed to the

⁴⁰ *Selected Works*, iii. 451.

⁴¹ See Augustine, *City of God*, ed. R. V. G. Tasker (London: Dent, 1945), XIII. 22.

⁴² *Inst.* I.15.8.

thesis that consciousness is essential to the soul. Otherwise, if consciousness were essential to the soul then the anaesthesia of soul sleep would entail the loss of the soul, its annihilation. The soul's subsequent existence would have to be 'gap inclusive', and the doctrine of soul sleep would then be indistinguishable from mortalism.

So far we have noted that Calvin vehemently denies soul sleep, that he is a marked dualist, and that he is reluctant to speculate about the nature of the intermediate state. However, on this last matter we might gain further insight into his views by reflecting on his remarks on the relation between the soul and the senses. He clearly thinks of the bodily senses in an instrumental fashion. The understanding and the will cannot receive data from the senses if they are disembodied. It may be natural for us to think of such an intermediate state on analogy with dreams in sleep. This might be thought of as common sense, yet our present-day 'common sense' might in fact be the result of the pervasive influence of Cartesianism. For Descartes, mental activity includes not only intellectual reflection, conceptual distinction and reasoning, but also emotion, pain and pleasure, mental images and sensations.⁴³ Descartes holds, after all, that there are no certain marks by which one may distinguish wakefulness from sleep, even the sleep enjoyed as a pure ego, for that is what I may well be. So Descartes might well consider disembodiment on the analogy of dreams, because for him consciousness was both necessary and sufficient for thought.

For Calvin (it seems) the soul, separated from the body that it animates, could lose consciousness and not thereby lose its identity. That is the error of soul sleep—an error, but not an incoherent or inconsistent view. But (he believes) the soul doesn't in fact lose consciousness. It doesn't because in his wisdom God grants to disembodied souls the continuation of consciousness. The redeemed are 'in the presence' of God in a way in which no anaesthetized soul, though a creature of God and upheld in being by him, could be. Nevertheless, the analogy of dreaming is not available to Calvin to characterize any aspect of the awareness that disembodied souls enjoy. This is because, whether Platonic or Aristotelian, in Calvin's world of thought the production of mental images, sensations, and the rest depends on the operation of the physical senses; the existence of images does not only depend on *having had* sensory input, but also requires current embodiment. So he says, in setting out his anthropology,

⁴³ For discussion of the contrast see Anthony Kenny, 'Cartesian Privacy', in G. Pitcher (ed.), *Wittgenstein: A Collection of Critical Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1968).

that though the soul 'is not properly enclosed by space, it however occupies the body as a kind of habitation, not only animating all its parts, and rendering the organs fit and useful for their actions, but also holding the first place in the regulating of conduct.'⁴⁴ The intellect governs the will, and bodily sense is under the control of the intellect.⁴⁵ So if through disembodiment the senses disappear, the intellect may continue to govern the will, but there is nothing for the soul to animate and regulate. The having of dreams in sleep, involving images of shapes and colours and spatial movement, and the use of the imagination when awake depend upon presently having a body to originate the bodily images for the mind to order, or disorder, as the case may be. For Calvin's pre-Cartesian world the distinction between soul and everything else is understood in terms of that between the mind and the senses. As disembodiment results, say, in a loss of hearing, so sensory imaging is no longer possible.⁴⁶

Suppose we consider whether a disembodied soul could remember. It could not have memory images, since having them depends on the senses being activated, even when asleep, but it could nonetheless make judgements, including presumably judgements about the past. Such a soul could make judgements about bodily pain, but not feel pain, except in the sense in which it is painful not to have one's desires fulfilled. So such a soul might wish to make judgements about the past, but be plagued with forgetfulness and be frustrated as a consequence because deprived of the data that the senses supply, even in dreaming. The desires, then, which Calvin thinks disembodied souls have⁴⁷ are aspirations, perhaps even aspirations for future embodiment, but not pleasurable desires for the immediate fulfilment of bodily appetites, or frustration at being unable to satisfy present bodily desires. In disembodiment one is deprived of the entire faculty or facility of experiencing such pleasures or pains, though one might have beliefs about them and therefore certain kinds of feelings. It is perhaps easier to see how Calvin, along with Platonists more generally, might see such a condition as an escape from a 'prison-house' (at least until being liberated by coming into possession of a resurrected body), whereas an Aristotelian such as Thomas Aquinas thought of such disembodiment as an imperfect state, diminished and anomalous. But even Thomas thought that in the intermediate state the soul is 'in a way freer

⁴⁴ *Inst.* I.15.6.

⁴⁵ *Inst.* I.15.7.

⁴⁶ On this point see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia 77.8.

⁴⁷ *Selected Works*, iii. 473: 'If they desire, they must be'.

to understand, in that the heaviness and preoccupations of the body keep it from pure intelligence.⁴⁸

At least according to Thomas such a soul is also under divine influences, which he refers to as 'divine light', during this intermediate period. But even with this assistance he reckons that the knowledge of natural things thus received is somewhat confused.⁴⁹ In a rather parallel way he distinguishes between that knowledge of individual things we have through abstraction from sensory experience (which is not available to the disembodied soul) and the post-mortem condition. In the intermediate state the soul cannot gain more of such knowledge, though it may retain what it has. However, according to Thomas such knowledge may be augmented by 'divine dispensation', by an immediate infusion of knowledge by God.⁵⁰

What about habitual knowledge, knowing how? Such know-how cannot be retained if it resides in the senses. But Thomas thinks that such a view is erroneous, and, following Aristotle, places such knowledge in the intellect, which is thus retained in disembodiment, even though there is not the capacity for its exercise. In such a state, then, one might fully retain one's knowledge of the six-times table, but only partially retain one's knowledge of how to eat with chopsticks. Or, Aquinas obscurely says, if one does retain it, 'knowledge acquired here remains in the separated soul in an actual way, but not according to the same mode'.⁵¹ One cannot avoid the impression that Aquinas is simply making up much of this, as when he claims that the intermediate souls form a heavenly society, while at the same time knowing what is going on here on earth without involving themselves in the affairs of the living.⁵² He relies to an excessive degree on a literal interpretation of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus to which he frequently refers. At this point it is not difficult to understand and to sympathize with Calvin's anti-speculative temper. Nevertheless, the general thrust of what Aquinas is arguing is clear, and in these general terms Calvin occupies this world of thought.

Why is Calvin so exercised by the teachings about soul sleep and mortalism? No doubt, it is chiefly if not wholly due to his desire to be faithful to the New Testament data, and particularly to the idea that the

⁴⁸ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia 89.2 (trans. Paul T. Durbin).

⁴⁹ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia 89.3.

⁵⁰ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia 89.5.

⁵¹ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia 89.6.

⁵² *Summa Theologiae*, Ia 89.8, 16.

faithful are immediately in the presence of God upon death, and aware of being so. As a consequence, he interprets New Testament references to death as 'sleep' (e.g. 1 Cor. 15: 51) not as to an anaesthetized *person*, but as references to the recumbent state of the *body* as it awaits resurrection. He is not exercised, as far as one can tell, by general worries about issues to do with personal identity and continuity through time of the sort that currently interest philosophers.

Despite these concerns he does not make much effort to attempt to say what he thinks the intermediate state of consciousness is like. Typical of the type of remark he makes is this comment on 1 Corinthians 15: 18: 'Some fanatics conclude that there is no life in the period intermediate between death and the resurrection; but this frenzy is easily refuted. For . . . the souls of the dead are now living, and enjoy quiet repose.'⁵³ The further details of the nature of this post-mortem consciousness emerge incidentally and have to be pieced together. So he says that rather than sleeping, after death the soul 'can perceive many things by sense and thought, no obstacle preventing'.⁵⁴ The sensing in question cannot be sense perception, of course, and Calvin seems to mean that the soul's conscious activity involves awareness of what is distinct from itself, some objects of memory, an awareness of God, and reflection on such awareness. In his *Treatise Against the Anabaptists* he provides us with a slight filling out of this. We must maintain, he says, not only that the soul is an essence but that 'after death, souls sense and recognise their condition and state'.⁵⁵ He briefly considers 'the state of souls after their separation from the body': 'We say that they are alive and have feeling'; that is, awareness.⁵⁶ Like Aquinas, Calvin places great store by the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, which, though a parable, and hence not to be treated with the literalism that Aquinas uses, does not mislead us about the state of the dead, but must be taken to have a basis in fact:

Souls have neither *fingers* nor *eyes*, and are not liable to thirst, nor do they hold such conversations among themselves as are here described to have taken place between *Abraham* and *the rich man*; but our Lord has here drawn a picture, which represents the condition of the life to come according to the measure of our capacity. The general truth conveyed is, that believing souls, when they have left their bodies, lead a joyful and blessed life out of this world, and that for the reprobate there are prepared dreadful torments,

⁵³ *Comm.* 1 Cor. 15: 18.

⁵⁴ *Selected Works*, iii. 444.

⁵⁵ *Treatise Against the Anabaptists*, 120.

⁵⁶ *Treatise Against the Anabaptists*, 123.

which can no more be conceived by our minds than the boundless glory of the heavens.⁵⁷

Does this mean that in that state the disembodied souls recognize other such souls, that there is communication between them? It seems not. There are similar comments in the *Treatise Against the Anabaptists*, but Calvin adds the underlying metaphysical point that ‘we must not imagine that souls are similar to bodies, thus occupying a certain space’.⁵⁸

PETER MARTYR VERMIGLI’S HYLOMORPHISM

While Calvin’s decided mind–body dualism shows that his cast of mind was Platonic, his fellow Reformer Peter Martyr Vermigli was just as decidedly Aristotelian, and also more obviously scholastic in style than Calvin. In order to try to estimate the strength of Vermigli’s Aristotelianism, it is worthwhile first to consider Thomas Aquinas’s view of the human person and of the prospect of the resurrection of the body. On his account the following three claims seem to be necessary:⁵⁹

- (1) A human being is one substance constituted by two subsistencies, soul and body.
- (2) *This* body (the body given at birth and subsequently) and *this* soul (ditto) are each necessary and together sufficient for being this particular human being.⁶⁰
- (3) If at a time t_1 a human being dies, and his soul is disembodied, there is a time subsequent to t_1 when his soul must be reunited with his body.

As we have seen, Calvin does not subscribe to these claims, for though he says at the beginning of his account of man as originally created that he consists of body and soul,⁶¹ it quickly becomes clear that a human person is a soul, an immortal essence ‘separated from the body’⁶² and (for a time, or times) possessing a body, thus denying (1). While (2) might be consistent with what Calvin says, it also may not. For example, when he is discussing, and rejecting, the view that at the resurrection we will receive new bodies, he does not reject this because it is metaphysically incongruous, but because this is not what

⁵⁷ *Comm. Luke 16: 23* (*Harmony*, II.188).

⁵⁸ *Treatise Against the Anabaptists*, 137; see also 127.

⁵⁹ Here I rely on the account provided by Eleonore Stump in ‘Non Cartesian Substance Dualism and Materialism without Reductionism’, *Faith and Philosophy*, 12 (1995), 505–31, though she paints a somewhat materialistic picture of Aquinas’s view.

⁶⁰ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia.89.

⁶¹ *Inst.* I.15.1.

⁶² *Inst.* I.15.2.

Scripture teaches.⁶³ And similarly, as regards (3), when he is arguing for the fact of resurrection he grounds it not in a natural necessity of the soul resuming the body, but in the omnipotence of God,⁶⁴ in Christological precedent,⁶⁵ and in the fact of our union with Christ. ‘For it were most absurd that bodies which God has dedicated to himself as temples should fall into corruption without hope of resurrection. What? are they not also the members of Christ?’⁶⁶

But what about Vermigli? How prominent and emphatic is his Aristotelianism when measured against our three conditions?

In his *Commentary* on 2 Kings 4 there is a scholium on the resurrection, which runs to about 35,000 words.⁶⁷ It is a carefully structured discussion along scholastic lines. For example, he treats the following question: Can the resurrection be proved by reason? In a very orderly way, there is appeal to biblical testimony, a discussion of the causes of the resurrection, a consideration of the condition of the resurrection, and, finally, answers to objections.

The discussion is largely organized around the following definition:

It (the resurrection of the dead) is a new union of the soul with the body by the force or power of God, so that whole persons may stand before the last judgment and may receive rewards or punishments on the basis of their previous life. All the various kinds of causes are stipulated in this definition. The formal cause is the union of soul and body, which also takes place as soon as humans are born, hence the addition of ‘new’ or ‘repeated’ (*Nova seu Iterata*), namely after death. We indicate the efficient cause when we state that it is to be done by divine force or power. The material cause is the soul and body which are again joined together. The final cause is so that the last judgment may be passed on a complete person.⁶⁸

We must note the different philosophical emphasis. For Calvin, a person is a soul inhabiting the ‘prison house’ of the body. For Vermigli only when embodied does the soul form a ‘whole person’. A person is not a whole person without a body, yet for Vermigli the soul is not simply the body’s animating and organizing principle, but metaphysically distinct from the body. For him the soul is the *form* of the body, in the sense that it informs the body, making it the characteristic thing that it is. We note also the prominence of Aristotelian fourfold causality.

⁶³ *Inst.* III.25.7.

⁶⁴ *Inst.* III.25.4.

⁶⁵ *Inst.* III.25.3.

⁶⁶ *Inst.* III.25.7.

⁶⁷ *Philosophical Works*, iv. *The Resurrection of the Dead*, trans. and ed. with an introd. and notes Joseph C. McLelland (Kirkville, Miss.: Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies, 1996). A general account of Vermigli’s anthropology may be found in John Patrick Donnelly, *Calvinism and Scholasticism in Vermigli’s Doctrine of Man and Grace* (Leiden: Brill, 1976). See the discussion of the relation between body and soul (pp. 91–2).

⁶⁸ Vermigli 56.

Vermigli distinguishes between two views of the relation of the soul to the body. According to the first, the soul is to the body as a sailor is to a ship or a moving object to the thing it moves; that is, presumably, the two have a purely contingent connection, familiar from Calvin and of course from Plato. Those who hold this view

are making an enormous mistake. For this is not the right way to link the soul to the body. The soul is its form and perfection, and one person or *hypostasis* results from uniting both of them together. Hence a propensity to take up their body again is left remaining in souls after death, and a very strong one. Plato seems not to be unmindful of this, and Pythagoras as well. For both of them propose *metempsychosis*, that is, if I may put it so, transmigration of souls [*transanimationem*]. For, as they wished, souls after death are transferred into their bodies again. Because they do not take on the same bodies, this was called migration rather than resurrection.⁶⁹

So a soul is not a full human person, for a person has a body. But how exactly is this soul, which is not fully personal, related to its body? What form does Martyr's hylomorphism take? It is clear that he takes 'The soul is the form of the body' to be a subject–predicate sentence, not a statement of identity. So Vermigli's Aristotelianism is not as materialist as some. A body is what the soul has, and what the soul forms or informs, so the soul is not identical to that which has a unique form and history. The soul may thus be understood as distinct from the body, but it nonetheless informs it, the particular body that it has, and after death, at the resurrection, it will once again inform this body (and not a numerically distinct body). Further, because the relationship is that of this soul informing this body, after the death of the body there remains in the soul a natural propensity to take up not simply *a* body but *this* body, the very body that is decaying in the grave. So this looks to be in accordance with our conditions (1) and (2) above.

By this Vermigli does not appear to mean that the resurrection of the body is a natural process, like that of a butterfly emerging from a chrysalis, much less that there is some kind of natural necessity to it, but that it is fitting and yet that it requires the power of God to effect it. The failure of the soul to be re-embodied in *this* body would be anomalous, and so the intermediate state must be considered anomalous as well. It is not surprising that Martyr does not, as far as I can see, describe the relationship between body and soul using the 'prison-house' analogy that Calvin so frequently employs, though he does occasionally refer to the body as the

⁶⁹ Vermigli 49–50.

‘tomb’ of the soul.⁷⁰ This is so, even though he is prepared to say that ‘a human person consists of two parts, as is clear to all; the soul, I mean, and the body... Souls do not perish together with the body but remain: therefore since they have not fallen [i.e. not fallen into the ground at death] they do not rise again.’⁷¹

Marilyn Adams’s ‘The Resurrection of the Body According to Three Medieval Aristotelians: Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, William Ockham’⁷² may make it possible to place Vermigli’s general outlook in the spectrum of medieval Aristotelianism. Much of the medieval discussion took place in the context of Averroes’ (Aristotle’s Arabic translator) view of the universal intellect. In general the Reformers were not too concerned with this issue, though perhaps Calvin occasionally takes an interest in it, as in his *Treatise Against the Libertines*, because it appeared that Averroes figures as one influence in the complex sources of the Libertine ideas, particularly their idea of a world spirit, though Calvin does not mention Averroes by name.⁷³

Medieval Christian Aristotelians had a variety of strategies for denying Averroism, and so for claiming that Aristotelianism is consistent with the teaching of divine revelation on the intermediate state and the resurrection of the body. In general it may be hazarded that of the three philosopher-theologians discussed by Adams—Thomas, Scotus, and Ockham—Aquinas is the most confident in the place of reason to establish that the soul, despite its being the form of the body, is able to exist *per se post mortem*; for him at least there is no identity between soul and body. According to Adams, the soul does not depend on anything else (created) for its existence, even though when united to a body it informs it. Humans differ from non-human animals in that they have activities in which the body does not share, for example abstracting from sensory inputs, and reasoning, and these activities could continue in a post-mortem state.

Vermigli seems to share this general outlook. From it, it is possible to come to certain conclusions about the intermediate state.⁷⁴ According to him souls ‘do not die but remain alive along with their powers and human properties. Hence those who die can be said to survive somehow in their

⁷⁰ Vermigli 121. ⁷¹ Vermigli 55.

⁷² *Philosophical Topics*, 20/2 (1992), 1 33. See also Christina Van Dyke, ‘Thomas Aquinas on Bodily Resurrection’, *Religious Studies*, 43 (2007), 373–94.

⁷³ See *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines*, ch. 13. The translator notes the possible influence of Averroes on the Libertines (p. 167).

⁷⁴ Such a view is common at least to Aquinas and Scotus (certainly in some places), despite their differences (see Adams 11, 14).

property and root.⁷⁵ By this he means that although certain faculties are not exercisable in the intermediate state, because the soul does not have its body, they are nevertheless preserved because, presumably, they are in some way essential to the human soul. Considering a series of philosophical arguments against the resurrection of the body Vermigli counter-argues as follows:

It was said also that in death the essential principles of a person are corrupted—not just the body but also the lower parts of the soul. The faculties for feeling perish, namely desire and temper, and those faculties that serve for nourishment and procreation. My response is that the use of these faculties is cut off by death, but the faculties themselves are not destroyed but are preserved whole in the soul which is separated from the body, so that when the body is returned to the soul, their use is also restored except what in this life is designed for either procreation or feeding the body.⁷⁶

Perhaps this is an argument merely from fittingness and economy. It is fitting that these lower ‘parts of the soul’ remain, rather than that they are annihilated upon death. But it may be an argument from the essence of the soul—in which case the activities of the soul which Vermigli mentions as being essential to it, though requiring a body for their exercise, must be present though unrealizable until again united with the body.

Vermigli’s work on visions, especially the distinction that he draws between sensory and intellectual knowledge, is also of help in reconstructing his view of the intermediate state.⁷⁷ According to Vermigli, the nature, substance, and essence of God cannot be grasped by the senses, though visions can be communications from God, and signs of his presence. In fact God’s essence, though known by the mind, is knowable only according to our capacity, which is essentially finite. So perhaps, being deprived of the body, souls may nevertheless experience events which are in some way intimations of the presence of God. Vermigli does not say, although he discusses the bodily causes of dreams and visions at some length.

He also discusses the question of whether the presence of our bodies is here and now a hindrance to the knowledge of God. The body was certainly not a hindrance as originally created, for our first parents knew God intimately, though having bodies:

The body was not an impediment but the means by which the first humans enjoyed no little familiarity with God. In fact it was sin that removed the sight of God from us. From it obscurity, darkness, blindness, and ignorance about the divine came upon us. For this cause are we transformed into moles, bats and

⁷⁵ Vermigli 64.

⁷⁶ Vermigli 123 4.

⁷⁷ Vermigli 138 9.

owls. Otherwise, unless the stain of sin intervenes, God is in his own nature clear, in fact light itself.⁷⁸

Vermigli's view of the soul may appear to make its intermediate state questionable, it being somehow unfitted to exist without the body, and therefore hard to account for. Nonetheless, he is clear that souls live on after the death of the body,⁷⁹ for at death the soul ceases to inform and direct the body, and so souls also may be said to undergo a resurrection.⁸⁰ The body-soul union is natural, therefore the intermediate state must in some sense be unnatural.⁸¹ Certainly Vermigli is ready to assert what Calvin seems reluctant to say, that post-mortem souls are not persons in the full sense. For the resurrection will be that of a 'whole and complete person.'⁸²

Nevertheless, he discusses the soul independently of the body,⁸³ referring to the body as the instrument of the soul.⁸⁴ Considering the objection that in death 'the faculties of feeling perish, namely desires and temper, and those faculties that serve for nourishment and procreation,' Vermigli argues, as noted, that the faculties of the soul are preserved when separated from the body and later reunited with it.⁸⁵ Although in death the sensory faculties perish, and emotions cannot be experienced, nevertheless these faculties are not destroyed but possessed in a dispositional form until the resurrection. 'There will be some variation but not in essential principles; only the accidents will be changed, which can vary while the subject remains identical.'⁸⁶

So there are significant differences between the two Reformers. Yet both Calvin and Vermigli work with a classical-philosophical view of the mind; they respect the medieval distinction between intellect and sense. As we have seen, being deprived of the body, the intermediate state of the soul is that it inhabits a world of understanding and judging. But neither Calvin nor Vermigli sees fit to explore the mind of someone who, though disembodied, once had a body. As we noted in Chapter 2, in the development of Reformed Orthodoxy the Calvinian anthropological stream may be said to have lost out to the Vermiglian stream, at least as evidenced by the representative statements gathered in Heppes's *Reformed Dogmatics*. This is also clear in the case of Francis Turretin, whose approach is conventionally Aristotelian and who never even takes a sidelong glance at the Platonism of his predecessor Calvin. Another example, as we have

⁷⁸ Vermigli 153.

⁷⁹ Vermigli 55.

⁸⁰ Vermigli 57.

⁸¹ Vermigli 58.

⁸² Vermigli 106.

⁸³ Vermigli 38 9.

⁸⁴ Vermigli 45.

⁸⁵ Vermigli 123 4.

⁸⁶ Vermigli 56.

seen, is Gisbert Voetius's hylomorphism and his opposition to the body–soul dualism of Descartes.⁸⁷

The theological implications of the philosophical differences between Aristotelian and Platonic accounts of the body–soul relation are potentially quite considerable. But in both Calvin's and Vermigli's discussion of the views of the intermediate state the differences are minimized because of their overriding desire to be faithful to the Scriptures, particularly what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15. So in the case of dualism, and in the case of Aristotelianism, the fact of resurrection and thus the need to stress the continuity of the individual after death controls the discrepant metaphysics and has a theologically harmonizing effect.

CHRIST'S 'INTERMEDIATE STATE'

There are two senses that may legitimately be given to Christ's 'intermediate state'. The first is the period between his death and resurrection. Calvin says little about this, except to stress that when Peter refers to Christ, after his death, preaching to 'the spirits in prison' he does not mean that Christ descended into hell ('no mention is made of the soul of Christ') but that by means of the Holy Spirit he preached to 'souls separated from their bodies'.⁸⁸

The second meaning is the period between Christ's session and the last judgement. About this Calvin says, or implies, a good deal. In his numerous lengthy and repetitive discussions about the Lord's Supper, and particularly about the mode of Christ's presence in the Supper, he maintains (principally against the Lutherans) that Christ's glorified body is localized—not localized in some earthly place but in heaven—and that such localization is necessary in view of the essentially local nature of a human body. To respect the reality of Christ's continued embodiment is fundamental to Calvin's idea of Christ's real presence at the Lord's Supper, as we will see. In his debates with the Lutheran Joachim Westphal (1511–74) he pours scorn on the Lutheran idea of the ubiquity of Christ's flesh, arguing that it is both incompatible with the teaching of Scripture and contrary to the nature of things, to the nature of bodies. Here is one rare instance where Calvin supplements the strength of biblical data by an independent metaphysical argument:

⁸⁷ H. Heppel, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. G. T. Thomson (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1950), ch. 9. On Voetius's hylomorphism see Aza Goudriaan, *Reformed Orthodoxy and Philosophy, 1625–1750* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 234–5.

⁸⁸ *Comm.* 1 Pet. 3: 18–19.

What? Do we place Christ midway among the spheres? or do we build a cottage for him among the planets? Heaven we regard as the magnificent palace of God, far outstripping all this world's fabric. Westphal makes a great talk about our making Christ dwell without having any locality: as if we had not taken care to obviate this quibble. Our reason for denying that Christ is concealed under the bread is, not because he is not properly inclosed by place, but because superior to all elements he dwells beyond the world.⁸⁹

After quoting the words of Augustine: In respect of the flesh which the Son of God assumed, in respect of his being born of a virgin, in respect of his being apprehended by the Jews, he is no longer with us,—he raises a shout of triumph, as if he had proved by this that Christ remains with us invisible. But Augustine declares that Christ, in respect of the flesh which he once assumed, is absent from us. If he deludes himself with the fallacious principle that Christ as God and man is wholly everywhere, let him at least spare Augustine, whose view is more correct.⁹⁰

Christ has taken his crucified body to heaven, and therefore it does not continue with us, and it cannot be really, that is physically, present at the Supper.

Nevertheless, Calvin insists that Christ's presence at the Lord's Supper is a real presence, and it is a real presence of the whole Christ. 'For although he adheres to his body as Mediator, yet the Spirit is the bond of sacred union, who, raising our souls upwards by faith, infuses life into us from the heavenly head.' 'When from the resemblance we infer that the body of Christ is finite, and has its dimensions just like our own, we have no intention to annihilate the excellent endowments with which it was adorned: we only show that the hope of future resurrection is overthrown, if a model of it is not exhibited in the flesh of Christ.'⁹¹ Or, as he puts it a little more formally: 'Though the body carried above the heavens is exempt from the common order of nature, it does not however cease to be a true body: though deprived of earthly qualities, it still retains its proper substance.'⁹² Hence, Lutheran ubiquity must be false, since it is inconsistent with the essential nature of bodies:

[T]hey flee to their ordinary pretext, that God is not bound by physical principles. I admit he is not, except in so far as he has so ordained. They rejoice, that this order takes effect only in the common course of nature, but not at all in theology.

⁸⁹ *A Second Defence of the Pious and Orthodox Faith Concerning the Sacraments in answer to the Calumnies of Joachim Westphal*, in *Selected Works*, ii. 290.

⁹⁰ *Last Admonition of John Calvin to Joachim Westphal*, in *Selected Works*, ii, 389–90.

⁹¹ *Selected Works*, ii. 390–1.

⁹² *Selected Works*, ii. 290.

That is true, unless indeed part of theology be the very order of nature, as it is in the present case. For we do not simply assert that Christ's body is in one place, because it is natural, but because God was pleased to give a true body to his Son, and one finite in its dimensions, and he himself was pleased to sojourn for a time on earth under the tabernacle of this body, and with the same body to ascend into heaven, from whence he bids us look for him.⁹³

It may seem from this and from the many other similar citations that could be given that central to Calvin's metaphysics of the Lord's Supper is a thesis about the necessarily localized character of Christ's flesh, his body, and about that only. But what of Christ's human soul? For Christ did not only assume a body, but also a human soul. Perhaps, although his body is localized, his human soul is dispersed, or dispersible? But this never seems to have been an issue. Since it is the nature of Christ's bodily presence that is in dispute with the Lutherans, it would be natural for that debate to concentrate on the nature of bodies and what kind of presence they are capable of. This is a dispute focusing on the meaning of Christ's words 'This is my body', and so a good reason why the debate should focus upon bodiliness.

Yet in fact Calvin extends the point about localization to the entire human nature of Christ. And this is not surprising, since he holds that Christ took on not a modified human nature, but real human nature, and that human souls are bounded, as bodies are. They are not bounded in the sense that they take up space, but they are nonetheless non-materially present with one body at once, and 'accompany' that body on its various travels even as they animate it to travel, in accordance with a person's beliefs and desires. As already noted, in the *Institutes* he states that although they occupy no space, souls are essentially located at one place at a time. In this respect they are like two different geometrical points, which though each takes up no space, necessarily have distinct, unique locations. It is metaphysically impossible for them to be diffused, or to occupy the same location. Of course geometrical points such as grid references mark points, rather than are points. Nonetheless they appear to behave somewhat analogously to the way in which Calvin must think of souls behaving. Souls, though immaterial, are not omnipresent. They are local. But they do not take up space:

But although Christ infuses life into us from his flesh and blood, we deny that there is any mingling of substance, because, while we receive life from the

⁹³ *Selected Works*, ii. 444; see also 454.

substance of the flesh and blood, still the entire man Christ remains in heaven. In this way we repudiate the bodily immensity which others feign.⁹⁴

For all Calvin argues to the contrary, the divine nature of Christ might also be as localized as is his human nature in the period between his ascension and his second coming, since what diffuses Christ's presence to the Church is not his divine nature, but the ministry of the Spirit. Yet such a 'localization' of the divine nature is of course impossible for him. We have already seen, in Chapter 4, that according to Calvin the union of the Logos with human nature is compatible with his continued omnipresence, upholding and sustaining the universe by his power: the *extra Calvinisticum*. The *extra* is part of the context of this discussion, and it is where in the *Institutes* this terminology is used.⁹⁵ The ascended and glorified Christ continues to exercise these powers, not only being Lord of the Church, but also Lord of creation. Immensity is an essential property of God, and the Logos, being God, also has the essential property of immensity. But in addition to that we have seen that in his account of the Lord's Supper Calvin also holds that Christ is made really present to his Church by virtue of the Spirit's 'presentation' of Christ to his faithful people as, in a multitude of localities, his death is celebrated by visible elements. How are we to understand this idea of presence twice over?

We might think that in addition to the Son's and the Spirit's omnipresence in virtue of their being divine, the Spirit is also diffusedly present in the Church as part of his economic role as the divine person who applies the effects of Christ's mediatorial work. The Spirit takes on this role, as the Logos took on the role of being the world's mediator. But in terms of immensity or omnipresence, the 'immeasurable'⁹⁶ Spirit's role of being diffusedly present cannot be another kind of omnipresence, as if he is doubly present, once by his divine nature, and then, in addition, by the special presence of Christ's Spirit. For there is one power or property, divine immensity, but its presence in its gracious aspect is only discernible by faithful Christians celebrating the Supper. It is as if the Spirit's presence has aspects like those of a radio signal. The signal is capable of being received in any part of the town, but only by someone who has a receiver. So Christ's presence, communicated by the 'secret' and 'incomprehensible' Spirit,⁹⁷ though a true, objective presence, is only capable of being discerned and enjoyed by the faithful. At least, that's what Calvin says most of

⁹⁴ *Selected Works*, ii. 401.

⁹⁵ *Inst.* IV.17.30.

⁹⁶ *Inst.* IV.17.10.

⁹⁷ *Selected Works*, ii. 408 9.

the time, though occasionally he says things that look to be sharply at odds with this, as we will see.

There are undoubted metaphysical curiosities and difficulties lurking here, as when Calvin says: 'What can be imagined more absurd than that the flesh of Christ was in heaven while he hung upon the cross? Yet undoubtedly the whole Christ, God and man, was then also in heaven.'⁹⁸ Here Calvin employs the *totus-totum* distinction. After his death, the whole Christ was in heaven even though all that is Christ was not, since at the moment of his post-mortem presence in heaven the body of Christ hung for a while on the Cross, and was buried. Even so, the presence of the whole Christ was enjoyed by his Church during the time between Jesus' death and resurrection, even though for that time his body was separated from his person. At least, that's what Calvin appears to be saying here. Similarly, at his heavenly session the whole Christ is present at the Lord's Supper but all that is Christ is not present, since his human nature is localized in heaven. For Calvin, the distinction between 'all that is Christ' and 'the whole Christ' comes to have a pivotal role in setting out the mode of Christ's presence at the Supper.

While after the Ascension Christ's human nature, body and soul, becomes localized in heaven, communicants at the Lord's Supper nevertheless enjoy the spiritual presence and efficacy of the body and blood of Christ wherever it may be celebrated. Christ sits at the right hand of the Father in respect of the substance of his flesh, yet filling the whole world with his power and virtue. The whole Christ is present, but not wholly. Not wholly, since he is localized in respect of his human nature. But the whole Christ in virtue of his identity as the God-man may be wholly present, as his local presence in the Supper is 'realized' by the action of the Spirit.

According to Calvin's 'realistic' view of Christ's presence at the Lord's Supper it is the Spirit of Christ who makes Christ real by presenting his work and its power to the worthy recipients of the emblems of his body and blood. 'The Spirit truly unites things separated by space.'⁹⁹ This is a 'real' presence, an objective 'presenting' of Christ's presence, and not simply a set of subjective changes in the recipients. It is objective because the presence of the Spirit is itself objective and not equivalent to sets of subjective human states, though no doubt the presence of the Spirit causes changes in these states. All this is, of course, a metaphysical thesis of some magnitude and obscurity, but it is nonetheless a necessary condition of

⁹⁸ *Selected Works*, ii, 418.

⁹⁹ *Inst.* IV.17.10.

Calvin's particular understanding of the 'presentation' of the whole Christ in the Supper. 'The fact that the body of Christ is finite, does not prevent him from filling heaven and earth, because his grace and power are everywhere diffused.'¹⁰⁰ At work in all this is Calvin's understanding of the *totus-totum* distinction, to which we now turn.

TOTUS-TOTUM

A key element in Calvin's discussion of the sense in which the whole Christ may be present at a place though not physically present there (since his human nature is localized in heaven) is his use of the medieval distinction between two kinds of presence, or two understandings of presence, *totus ubique, sed non totum*. Calvin takes this from Lombard, referring to it in one place as a 'trite' distinction.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, the distinction can also be found in Thomas Aquinas, and no doubt elsewhere. In discussing the simplicity of God, Thomas considers the objection that if he is simple it must be possible to comprehend God, since what is simple, having no parts, must be understood as a whole. 'Therefore, if he were simple, he would be attained as a whole by the blessed, but what is attained as a whole is comprehended.' But of course it is fundamental that the creature cannot comprehend the Creator, and so God cannot be simple. To this he responds by using the *totus-totum* distinction. The blessed attain to the whole God, but not wholly. The argument is that since he is simple God does not have parts, but since he is infinite that simplicity nevertheless cannot be comprehended by the creature. 'It should be said that the whole God is attained by the mind of the blessed but not wholly, because the mode of the divine knowability infinitely exceeds the mode of created intellect. Thus the created intellect cannot understand God as perfectly as he is intelligible and accordingly cannot comprehend him.'¹⁰¹ The application of the distinction is rather different from Calvin's, who is arguing that although Jesus Christ has parts, the whole Christ is nevertheless present at the Lord's Supper even though 'all that is Christ', which includes his human nature, and particularly his human body, is not and cannot be present.

Reference to the distinction occurs quite frequently in Calvin's discussions of the Supper, and though he may consider it to be trite it

¹⁰⁰ *Comm. Gen.* 28: 12.

¹⁰¹ 'On the Divine Simplicity, Disputed Question of the Power of God, 7, trans. and ed. Ralph McInerney in *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings* (London: Penguin, 1998), 294.

nevertheless plays a critical role in his defence of his own views,¹⁰² as in this paragraph from the introduction to his *Commentary on Jeremiah*:

But Christ, it is said, sits as the Father's right hand, which is to be taken as meaning everywhere, confined within no limits. I indeed allow that God's right hand is unlimited, and that wherever it is there is the kingdom of Christ; which is metaphorically represented in Scripture by the term sitting: for whatever is declared of God is beyond controversy to be now ascribed to Christ; and therefore to sit, which means to govern the world, is what Christ has in common with the Father; and still more, as the Father by him sustains the world, rules all things by His power, and especially manifests the presence of His grace in governing His Church, He may be said, strictly speaking, to reign in His own person. It hence follows, that He in a manner is everywhere; for He can be limited by no place who sustains and protects all parts of heaven and earth, and rules and regulates by His power all things above and below. When now I name Christ, I include the whole Person of his only-begotten Son, as manifested in the flesh. He, I say, God and man, is everywhere as to His authority and incomprehensible power, and infinite glory, according to what the faithful experience by evident effects, as they know and feel His presence. It is not then without reason that Paul declares, that he dwells in us. (Eph. 3.17) But to distort what is said of His infinite power, which is evident in His spiritual gifts, in the invisible aid which He affords, and in the whole of our salvation, and to apply it to his flesh, is by no means reasonable or consistent.

I wish that many of those who are with little reason angry with us, were at least to recall to mind that common and notable saying used in the Papal Schools, 'Christ is whole everywhere, but not altogether' (*Christus ubique totus est, sed non totum*). They may reject it as it is in the barbarous language of *Peter Lombard*, which is not pleasant to their tender and delicate ears. It is yet wisely expressed, from whomsoever it may have come, and I willingly adopt it.¹⁰³

The basic distinction is conveyed by the use of the masculine and neuter forms of *totus*, the whole, and it is used to highlight two ways in which Christ may be referred to: as he is whole Christ, and wholly Christ. The whole Christ (*totus*) is God and man, a person with two natures. The whole Christ is everywhere, and so it is possible that by his Spirit he is really present in the Lord's Supper. The whole Christ was present during his earthly ministry. But the whole Christ is not now present at any place on earth, since his body is located in heaven. Nonetheless, according to the distinction, although the whole Christ cannot be present, Christ may be wholly present.

¹⁰² e.g. *Inst.* IV.17.30; *Selected Works*, ii. 418, 457, 488, 514 15.

¹⁰³ *Comm.* Jer. xix xx.

Francis Turretin explains the distinction in this way:

It is one thing to speak of the whole Christ; another to speak of the whole of Christ. The whole Christ is God and man, but not the whole of Christ. Whole in the masculine (*totus*) denotes a person in the concrete, but whole in the neuter (*totum*) a nature in the abstract. Therefore it is rightly said that the whole Christ is God or man because this marks the person; but not the whole of Christ because this marks each nature which is in him.¹⁰⁴

According to the *totus–totum* distinction, the concrete union of divine and human natures in Christ, *totus Christus*, licenses the communication of properties.¹⁰⁵ Given a reference to the one Christ (*totus*), what is said of one part may be said about another. But his distinct natures (*totum*), divinity and humanity, cannot have the properties of each other, even though the one Christ (*totus*) has both divine and human properties. As we might say, the penny has the Queen's head on it, even though the properties of the 'heads' side of the penny are distinct from the properties of the 'tails' side. So the penny has the Queen's head, but not all parts of the penny have it. The whole penny is visible even though the penny is not wholly visible, in that in seeing it there are always aspects of it that are hidden from sight. It is in this sense, I suspect, that Calvin calls the distinction 'trite', because we normally employ the distinction without noticing it. Understood in this way it is not a distinction that is gerrymandered simply for the purposes of defending one view of the Supper. The theanthropic person has the properties of both natures. Where the human nature of Christ is not locally present, still there Christ's human nature may be said to be, inasmuch as the mediator is present and the mediator has a human nature. So the part may be taken for the whole; indeed, according to Calvin, because of the theanthropic union the part must be taken for the whole—just as, while the penny has the properties that each side of the penny has, and when the penny is heads up the whole penny is heads up, and the whole penny may be seen, nevertheless part of the penny, its tails side, is not side up and not in view.

So there are two stages to Calvin's thought at this point. The first has to do with the communication of properties. According to him, scriptural teaching regarding the unity of Christ's person licenses us to say that the whole Christ is present when strictly speaking all parts of him are not wholly present. That's the first phase. But then the presence of this 'whole'

¹⁰⁴ *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. G. M. Giger, ed. J. T. Dennison (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P. & R., 1992 7), XIII.vii.xvii.

¹⁰⁵ *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, XIII.viii.v.

Christ is made objectively real by the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Lord's Supper, and presumably on other occasions as well. Nevertheless, while Calvin believes that the *totum–totus* distinction is of some help in thinking about Christ's real presence, he also believes that the manner in which Christ's presence at the Supper is real is 'ineffable'.

So he maintains that in the Lord's Supper '[t]he whole Christ is everywhere, yet everything which is in him, is not everywhere'.¹⁰⁶ He is the whole Christ who is present, because his divine person is in union with human nature, so where he is it is, but not in respect of his human body, or his human nature, considered distinctly, for this is necessarily localized, as Calvin repeatedly and emphatically maintains. So Christ's human and divine properties remain distinct. Though wholly present, Christ's body is thus not *locally* present at any celebration of the Supper, because, being bounded, it is not capable of being locally present at many different places, at many simultaneous celebrations of the Lord's Supper (as in Lutheranism), and in any case it is localized in heaven.

Christ is wholly present by the power of the Spirit. So, as we have seen, integral and central to Calvin's particular understanding of the Lord's Supper is a metaphysical thesis first about bodies, including Christ's resurrected and glorified body, and the consequent claim in which nevertheless Christ is said to be undividedly and so really present in the Supper. 'The body with which Christ rose is declared, not by Aristotle, but by the Holy Spirit, to be finite, and to be contained in heaven until the last day'.¹⁰⁷ So, in the context of the Supper, ubiquity is ascribed in the concrete to the whole person, in respect of the union of God and man in the Incarnation, but not to the human nature per se. In Calvin's eyes this understanding of the way in which Christ is present and absent, Christ in his divine nature everywhere present, in his human nature localized in heaven but the whole Christ present by the efficacy of the Spirit's action in the worthy receiving of the Lord's Supper, is vital. For this way of thinking of Christ's presence and absence cuts off both transubstantiation and consubstantiation, a necessary condition of which is the immensity of the human nature of Christ (consubstantiation) or the indefinitely localizable human nature of Christ (transubstantiation).

In utilizing the *totus–totum* distinction Calvin is not simply pointing to the fallacy of division. That fallacy lies in claiming that the properties of a whole are necessarily possessed by each part of the whole, considered separately. While every part of the surface of the wholly blue ball is blue,

¹⁰⁶ *Inst.* IV.17.30.

¹⁰⁷ *Inst.* IV.17.26.

not every thread of my tartan tie is tartan. So the properties of a whole may or may not be possessed by each part of the whole: there is no entailment. Calvin is not simply saying that while the whole Christ is divine his assumed human nature, considered separately from his divine person, is not divine. That would not be a very distinctive or contentious point to be making. It is rather that even when considered as human, as physically localized, Christ's human nature is also present, but not physically present, in virtue of its union with the eternal Word and also by the efficacy of Christ's Spirit. It is really present wherever the Supper is celebrated, and so contributes to the whole Christ being present. Perhaps Calvin is maintaining that Christ's person is a special case of composition; whether this is true or not, his thesis certainly concerns a special case. In an 'ineffable' way Christ is wholly present at a place even when he is not physically present at that place. It's a special case of the avoiding of the fallacy. It is not merely a case of 'It doesn't necessarily follow from A being X that every part of A is X' but of 'It necessarily doesn't follow from A being X that every part of A is X'.

Calvin's use of the 'wholly Christ' device in his defence of his own understanding of the Lord's Supper is parallel to his 'as mediator' approach to the unity of the person of the God-man.¹⁰⁸ As mediator, in virtue of the divine decree to become Incarnate in the Son, and the unity of the person of the God-man, Christ is whole, and certain predicates are applicable to this whole Christ; for example, the predicate 'being present'. Similarly, in the Supper Christ is whole in respect of his secret power, but not wholly present because his human nature is localized in heaven. 'We fully illustrate the distinction between the flesh of Christ in the abstract and his person, while they [the Lutherans] most perversely confound it.'¹⁰⁹ By this distinction Calvin invalidates the argument that because the divine nature of Christ is infinite, Christ is infinite. Christ's body is not immense and omnipresent. The 'flesh of Christ is invested with heavenly glory, not divested of its own nature.'¹¹⁰ As a consequence '[i]t is impossible to comprehend how the body of Christ is in a certain part of heaven, above the heavens, and yet the person of Christ is everywhere.'¹¹¹ Though Christ as God and man, and as the mediator between God and men, is whole and undivided, and fills heaven and earth, yet in respect of his flesh he is only

¹⁰⁸ See Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas*, ch. 3.

¹⁰⁹ *Selected Works*, ii, 465.

¹¹⁰ *Selected Works*, ii, 489, 514.

¹¹¹ *The True Partaking of the Flesh and Blood of Christ in the Holy Supper* (written against the Lutheran Tileman Heshusius 1527-88), in *Selected Works*, ii, 514.

in heaven. Yet the mediator is not prevented by distance of place from infusing life into us from his flesh.¹¹²

At this point it is appropriate once again to reflect a little on Calvin's understanding of the respective roles of the Spirit and the person of Christ himself in effecting the real presence of Christ at the Lord's Supper. What ensures the real presence? We must note that for Calvin that presence is only enjoyed by a believing participation in the Supper. Such a reception is itself an effect of the Spirit's work, perhaps a special case of Word and Spirit. But is his work confined to the side of faithful reception? Does the Spirit simply make Christ really present through imparting faith and discernment to recognize the real presence of Christ that is already present? That is certainly part of it. But does the Spirit in addition in some way contribute to or ensure that Christ is really and objectively present at the Lord's Supper? Does he present Christ, the whole Christ but not wholly Christ? Does he do both? Is he a necessary condition of the faithful reception of the real Christ, or (and also) a necessary condition of the objective presence of the real Christ?

Here there is potential for suggesting that, in fact if not in intention, in his writings on the Supper Calvin refers to two forms of the 'real presence'. Perhaps Christ is 'really present' in both these forms simultaneously, even necessarily, but they are, conceptually speaking, quite distinct. In the metaphysically weaker form of the real presence, on the occasion of a faithful partaking of the Lord's Supper the Holy Spirit communicates to the believer the reality of the whole Christ's love, mercy, and grace of which the crucifixion is the supreme expression. Partaking of the elements of the Supper focuses and expresses these virtues, heightens awareness of them, and feeds and strengthens faith in Christ. It might be that such a view is to be understood as an extension of, or a special case of, the work of Spirit and Word together.

In the stronger form of the 'real presence', the Spirit conveys not simply the virtues and graces of Christ but the whole Christ himself, though (as we have seen) not all that is Christ. So the whole Christ is really present at the Lord's Supper, even though there may be physically dispersed multiple celebrations of it, just as the one penny may be seen by many people at once. It is the one God-man who is really and multiply present though not all that is this God-man is present, just as not all of the penny is seen by all who see it at once. By virtue of the unity of divine person and human nature the one person is present, yet not all that comprises his two natures

¹¹² *Selected Works*, ii. 488 9.

is present, for at least his human body cannot be present, since it is localized in heaven, nor could it be multiply present, since it is a truly physical body, not capable of being in two places at once.

There are two reasons for thinking that Calvin, at least occasionally, favours this stronger view. One is the importance that he attaches to the *totus–totum* distinction, as we have seen. We might say that it is this distinction, notwithstanding its ‘triteness’, that does all the heavy lifting. The distinction is unnecessary for presenting the weaker view, since on that view the Christ who is really present at the Supper is a wholly ‘spiritualized’ Christ, it is the virtues or powers of Christ that are ‘presented’. The second reason is Calvin’s lyrical, almost ecstatic language as he seeks to convey the nature of Christ’s presence at the Lord’s Supper, all the while recognizing that he will inevitably fail to do so. For example:

If, indeed, it be lawful to put this great mystery into words, a mystery which I feel, and therefore freely confess that I am unable to comprehend with my mind, so far am I from wishing anyone to measure its sublimity by my feeble capacity. No, I rather exhort my readers not to confine their apprehension within those too narrow limits, but to attempt to rise much higher than I can guide them. For whenever this subject is considered, after I have done my utmost, I feel that I have spoken far beneath its dignity. And though the mind is more powerful in thought than the tongue in expression, it too is overcome and overwhelmed by the magnitude of the subject. All then that remains is to break forth in admiration of the mystery,—which it is plain that the mind is inadequate to comprehend, or the tongue to express.¹¹³

The ‘great mystery’ is the nature of full communion with Christ. Calvin frequently refers to the mysteries of the faith, and to the incomprehensibility of the divine essence and will, but this language is, by his usual standards, extraordinary. The first possibility, that the Spirit presents Christ by illuminating and imparting, and so conveys Christ’s and his benefits as Word and sign come together and are faithfully received, is not, by Calvin’s standards, especially ineffable. It is the standard Reformation fare of Word and Spirit. Here’s the textual basis for this view:

As we cannot at all doubt that it [Christ’s body] is bounded according to the invariable rule in the human body, and is contained in heaven, where it was once received, and will remain till it return to judgment, so we deem it altogether unlawful to bring it back under these corruptible elements, or to imagine it everywhere present. And, indeed, there is no need of this, in order to our partaking of it, since the Lord by his Spirit bestows upon us the blessing of being one with

¹¹³ *Inst.* IV.17.7.

him in soul, body, and spirit. The bond of that connection, therefore, is the Spirit of Christ, who unites us to him, and is a kind of channel by which everything that Christ has, and is, is derived to us.¹¹⁴

The picture here is of Christ being present by his Spirit. As Calvin puts it in another place:

But though it seems an incredible thing that the flesh of Christ, while at such a distance from us in respect of place, should be food to us, let us remember how far the secret virtue of the Holy Spirit surpasses all our conceptions, and how foolish it is to measure its immensity by our feeble capacity. Therefore, what our mind does not comprehend let faith conceive—i.e., that the Spirit truly unites things separated by space.¹¹⁵

Here, the Spirit is the one who spans the ether. The Spirit is a bond, a channel, a span, between the believer and Christ in his heavenly location. By comparison with the stronger view, this is much more straightforward, more familiar, less ineffable, though still, of course, inconceivable.

The centrality of Calvin's use of the *totus–totum* distinction to support his stronger view of the real presence provides one reason for thinking that Richard Cross's revisionist proposal of Calvin's account of the real presence must be wide of the mark.¹¹⁶ Cross's proposal is that bodily presence (including that of Christ) may be thought of not only in terms of spatial presence at a place, but also as including the direct, immediate cause of an effect at a place distant from the body's spatial location. So a body may be physically present where it is not spatially present.

Suppose we grant this, though it could be contested. We have seen that Calvin is (to say the least) reluctant to entertain the bodily presence of Christ at the Lord's Supper even in this extended sense. For he wants to argue for the view that Christ's presence, though real, is not in any sense bodily or physical; it is not 'carnal'. Cross's idea seems to be that Calvin, in affirming a doctrine of the real presence of Christ, does not wish to affirm this reality as a bodily presence since he (mistakenly, Cross is suggesting) thinks that bodily presence entails spatial presence. But the fact is that Calvin is less than keen on—indeed resolutely opposed to—thinking of the real presence of Christ at the Supper in bodily terms to begin with. His question is not: How can I find a place for the bodily presence of Christ in the face of Roman and Lutheran errors? He is not following that trajectory. He is not interested in a presence that is that of a bodily

¹¹⁴ *Inst.* IV.17.12.

¹¹⁵ *Inst.* IV.17.10.

¹¹⁶ 'Catholic, Calvinist, and Lutheran Doctrines of Eucharistic Presence: A Brief Note towards a Rapprochement', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 4/3 (2002), 301–18.

substance and how it might be explicated. Rather, he is clear—amid much that is not so clear—that bodily presence is not necessary for real presence, except as this is understood by means of the *totus–totum* distinction. Calvin is not prepared to let go of the real, objective presence of Christ, whether that is mediated by the Spirit or is conveyed in some even more ineffable way.

There is further, more circumstantial evidence for this reading of Calvin, and in favour of the rejection of Cross's proposal. Francis Turretin, successor to Calvin at Geneva, in discussing various modes of presence in his treatment of the Lord's Supper, makes a distinction between kinds of causal presence that is similar though not exactly the same as Cross's:

Presence is not to be confounded with propinquity. What is near is not always present, and what is present is not always near. For example, the sun is present to us (although it is situated far off) when it shines upon us with its rays and nothing intervenes between it and the eye. Yet it is said to be absent at night (although sometimes it is nearer to us than during the day) because we do not feel its power in the nocturnal darkness. In this sense, Augustine said that the light surrounding the eyes of the blind man as well as of one who could see was present to the latter, absent from the former. Hence it is evident that the presence of created things is not to be measured either by propinquity or distance of places, but is to be estimated by that relation by which he to whom the thing is present can enjoy it suitably. Presence is opposed not to distance but to absence.¹¹⁷

But, as far as I can see, having made this mode of real presence clear and available, Turretin does not use it. For he depends in his later understanding of the Lord's Supper on this further sense:

Fourth, real presence can be understood in two ways; either by nearness and corporeal contact, as a body is said to be really present which is somewhere nearby and by reason of locality, or by efficacy and virtue which efficaciously operates somewhere.¹¹⁸

Given the analogy with the activity of the sun, and Augustine's example of blindness and sightedness, it is open to Turretin to say that in the Lord's Supper there is a pervasive activity of Christ's body in the administration of the Supper, so making his presence a bodily, and thus a 'real', presence. But he does not go down this road. Rather, the mode of the presence of Christ which his analogies illuminate is presence 'as to efficacy and virtue';

¹¹⁷ *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, XIX.xxviii.iii.

¹¹⁸ *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, XIX.xxviii.iii.

that is, the virtue of Christ's ascended body exerts its power on the faithful, but not in a bodily fashion. In this sense neither of the analogies is apt.

What this evidence from Turretin also suggests is that Calvin's insistence on what I have called the stronger view turns out to have a short life in Reformed theology. Not least, one imagines, due to its inherent obscurity. By the time of Francis Turretin the weaker view seems to have totally supplanted the stronger.

Pure Nature and Common Grace

THIS final chapter continues our study of Calvin's anthropology begun in the previous one. But now we probe Calvin's understanding of the effects of the Fall on human nature, and the bearing of this on his understanding of natural law and common grace. In particular we examine what basis there is in Calvin for the view of him, and of Calvinism, associated with the nineteenth-century Calvinist theologians Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) and Herman Bavinck (1854–1921). This continues the discussion begun in Chapter 12 of *John Calvin's Ideas*, which explored the centrality and the uniqueness of Calvin's idea of common grace as the basis for a consistent and distinctive Christian understanding of culture.

According to Calvin, such common grace is an aspect of God's providence by which, despite the Fall, he maintains human society and culture and restrains evil. Such grace, 'common' in the sense that it is universally distributed, is the source of human goodness and giftedness in people who do not necessarily experience the special or regenerating grace of God.¹ The source of this goodness is not inherent in human nature, but in God's freely given and undeserved benevolence toward sinful humanity.²

We will first focus on what Calvin's account of the Fall reveals about mankind and the character of its remaining powers given the fact of human sin. We will set out his anthropology in the context both of Augustine's views, and of those of Thomas Aquinas, noting in particular some strong similarities to Thomas as well as some differences. We will then outline some of the presuppositions of 'common-grace Calvinism' (as we will call the idea as developed by Kuyper and particularly by Bavinck) and show that in fact these presuppositions are sharply at odds with Calvin's account of human fallenness. A possible explanation of this

¹ *Inst.* II.2.12 17.

² There seem to be relatively few passages in which Calvin uses the term 'common grace'. According to Quirinius Breen (as cited by Susan E. Schreiner), among these are his commentaries on Amos 9: 7, Col. 1: 29, Heb. 1: 5, and Rom. 5: 18 (Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory* (Durham, N.C.: Labyrinth, 1991), 146 n. 49).

misreading will be examined. Finally, we will sketch Calvin's contrast between the 'earthly things' and the 'heavenly things' (which we touched on in Chapter 8) in the light of our overall findings.

THE BACKGROUND TO CALVIN'S ANTHROPOLOGY

One key passage for our discussion, to which Calvin refers more than once, is in Augustine's anti-Pelagian work *On Nature and Grace*.³ In the short chapter 3 Augustine makes a series of important distinctions. The first is between two senses of 'nature': fallen and unfallen. 'Man's nature, indeed, was created at first faultless and without any sin; but that nature of man in which every one is born from Adam, now wants the Physician, because it is not sound.'⁴ Second, he draws a distinction between the good qualities remaining in fallen nature and the evil qualities it comes to have as a result of the Fall. 'All good qualities, no doubt, which it still possesses in its make, life, senses, intellect, it has of the Most High God, its Creator and Maker.'⁵ Here we see a possible antecedent of the later Calvinist view of common grace. But we will also see that these distinctions are fundamental to Western Christian anthropology, as we will discover shortly, both in Aquinas, and, then, in Calvin.

Augustine has a view of nature and of evil drawn in metaphysical terms, some of the language of which is in turn drawn from Platonism, even if it ultimately finds warrant, for him, in the biblical account of the goodness of the creation, and its receiving of that goodness from the all-good Creator. Existence is good, and the only proximate source of good. Evil is the absence of good, a privation, a lack or loss. So it follows as a metaphysical truth for Augustine that evil can 'exist' only as parasitic upon some good, and only in so far as it is a 'withdrawal from a substance'.⁶ An evil nature or an evil agent in that it exists is good, despite its evil. So that the Fall, since it did not entail the annihilation of the ones who fell, must be thought of as the perversion of the good:

Sin is not a substance; but God is a substance, yea the height of substance and only true sustenance of the reasonable creature. The consequence of departing from Him by disobedience, and of inability, through infirmity, to receive what

³ Augustine, *On Nature and Grace*, in *St. Augustine: Anti Pelagian Writings*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1971).

⁴ *Nature and Grace*, ch. 3.

⁵ *Nature and Grace*, ch. 3.

⁶ *Nature and Grace*, ch. 22.

one ought really to rejoice in, you hear from the Psalmist, when he says: 'My heart is smitten and withered like grass, since I have forgotten to eat my bread'.⁷

So the coming of sin led to loss, since sin is itself a loss, infecting us with defects, inabilities and infirmities, as Augustine calls them. This is a forceful expression both of Augustine's view of evil as basically privative and also of the organic character of human nature; the Fall, like a pathogen, eats away at human nature without annihilating it.

Like Augustine, Aquinas has an organic view of human nature as it was originally created. And so when sin occurred the whole of human nature was affected. Thomas, no doubt also like Augustine, in intending to echo the Genesis creation account, sees nature as a 'good'. He thinks of nature primarily in terms of substance, the set of properties comprising the essence of a human being and the various essences of all other created beings. And what he argues is that sin brings about a change in that substance, but it does not result in its complete destruction. The substance remains essentially intact, and so some of its goodness remains, but its essential features are deformed by a change in certain of their accidental features. By these changes the remaining powers of human nature are incapacitated, though not of course eliminated, and perhaps the degree of incapacitation varies from power to power. Suppose as a result of an accident a person becomes paralysed. He loses the power of locomotion, but he remains a human being, so that we may say that the typical expression of his essential properties becomes compromised. The significance of the essence–accident distinction will emerge later on.

The good in human nature is threefold. First there are the principles constitutive of nature together with the properties derived from them, for example the powers of soul and the like. Secondly, since it is from this nature itself that man has an inclination to virtue, as previously indicated, this inclination is itself a good of nature. Thirdly, the gift of original justice can be termed a good of human nature in the sense that in the first man it was bestowed as a gift to all mankind.⁸

Aquinas claims that of the three, the first is neither destroyed nor diminished by sin, the second is lessened through sin, and the third is totally removed. Let us look further at what will chiefly interest us in our discussion of common grace to follow.

In saying that sin does not destroy or diminish the constitutive principles or powers of the soul (*nec tollitur ned diminuitur*), Aquinas claims

⁷ *Nature and Grace*, ch. 22. The passage indicates Augustine's essentialist account of God and of the creation, as seen also, for example, at *City of God*, XII.2.

⁸ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia 2ae 85.1 (trans. T. C. O'Brien).

that human nature remains intact, not one of its essential features or powers is lost. The first man was every bit as much a man when fallen and sinful as he was before; he remained a body–soul composite, he retained his humanity with its mental and moral powers. The Fall did not denature, but it did diminish the original powers of that nature. Further, the pursuit of virtue with which humankind was originally endowed, prior to the Fall, which is also essential to human nature, is not removed, but according to Thomas it is ‘lessened’. So ‘while nature itself is not intrinsically changed through a deviation in voluntary action, still its inclination is changed with regard to direction towards a term.’⁹ Sin lessens the good of nature in that it is ‘a diminution of this good inasmuch as it involves the disorder of an act’.¹⁰ So we may say that human nature, though intact, is ‘disordered’ by sin (a very Calvinian term!). It is essential to man that he act in accordance with reason, purposely, and that he seek the good (even though he may have an impoverished view of what the good is), and so these features cannot be taken away without denaturing him. What happens is that the inclination to the good is lessened and misdirected, in that it is hindered and wounded, receiving the wounds of weakness, ignorance, malice, and concupiscence.¹¹

In *Aquinas, Calvin, and Contemporary Protestant Thought*¹² Arvin Vos also stresses that for Aquinas the Fall introduces systemic disorder into human nature. He too points out that according to Aquinas it is not possible without the theological virtue of charity to direct the moral virtues, which we all may possess by nature, to God. As Thomas puts it:

Only the infused virtues are perfect, and deserve to be called virtues absolutely, since they direct a man well to the absolutely ultimate end. The other virtues, those namely that are acquired, are virtues in a limited sense, not without qualification. They direct a man well in respect to what is final in some particular field, not in the whole of life. Accordingly, on the text, *All that is not of faith is sin*, the Gloss comments from Augustine, *He that fails to acknowledge the truth has no virtue, even if his conduct be good*.¹³

This is an important claim. Infused virtues are those that are the effect of divine grace and are motivated by *caritas*, love of God and neighbour.

⁹ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia 2ae 85.1: reply 2.

¹⁰ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia 2ae 85.1: reply 4.

¹¹ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia 2ae 85.3.

¹² (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1985), esp. 143–7.

¹³ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia 2ae 65.2, quoted by Vos at p. 143.

Without such infusion, virtues motivated in lesser ways, acquired virtues, express themselves in acts which may mirror those done through infused virtues, but are not true virtues. The virtues of fallen nature that remain, those not infused by divine grace, are 'limited'. Part of the aim of this chapter is to show that this understanding of Aquinas (as well as that of Augustine) forms a natural backdrop to Calvin, an important part of the context in which Calvin thought, even though it may be that Calvin was not himself a close student of Thomas.

Summarizing, in both Augustine and Aquinas we are presented with an essentialist and an organic view of human nature. Sin is the loss of original virtue or righteousness, which, however, does not entail the loss of humanity, but the weakening and disorder of human nature.

The essential point as far as our argument is concerned is that according to Aquinas as a result of the Fall a human being remains as such, but his nature, that which is constitutive of him as a human being, is weakened or impaired in its 'connatural inclination to virtue' by the total loss of what Aquinas calls 'the gift of original justice'.¹⁴ Thus there arises a significant contrast between Aquinas's anthropology and that of later Roman Catholic writers such as Thomas Cajetan (1470–1534) and theologians of the Counter-Reformation such as Francis Suarez (1548–1617). Aquinas presents the relation of 'original justice' to human nature in much more organic terms than the—according to Henri De Lubac and more recent commentators such as Martin Stone¹⁵—later account of human nature in terms of two fairly clearly distinguishable 'layers': nature and supernature. We will see that for whatever reason the Cajetan view prevailed within the Roman Catholic fold, though opposed by Jansenists and certain Augustinians such as the Louvain theologian Michael Baius (1513–89). More significantly for us, it came to be regarded as *the* Roman Catholic view, for instance by nineteenth-century Reformed theologians. So the organic Augustinian view, to which (as we will shortly see) Calvin adhered, and Aquinas subscribed, came to be eclipsed. Shortly we will explore the consequences of this shift for the development in Reformed thought of the idea of 'common grace'.

¹⁴ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia 2ae 85.1: reply.

¹⁵ Henri De Lubac, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2000); M. W. F. Stone, 'Michael Baius (1513–89) and the Debate on "Pure Nature": Grace and Moral Agency in Sixteenth century Scholasticism', in Jill Kraye and Risto Saarinen (eds.), *Moral Philosophy on the Threshold of Modernity* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005).

CALVIN'S ANTHROPOLOGY

We turn now to consider Calvin's own anthropology. According to Calvin, mankind, made in the image of God, reflects the glory of his Creator. The image of God is especially situated in the soul:

By this term is denoted the integrity with which Adam was endued when his intellect was clear, his affections subordinated to reason, all his senses duly regulated, and when he truly ascribed all his excellence to the admirable gifts of his Maker.¹⁶

In the *Institutes* of 1559 Calvin rejected the patristic and medieval view that in the case of the two scriptural terms 'image' and 'likeness' (Gen. 1: 26) 'image' refers to man as an intellectual being, possessing discernment and intelligence, and 'likeness' refers to the traces of divinity in his physical powers and appearance.¹⁷ On Calvin's account in the *Institutes*, the terms 'image' and 'likeness' in the Genesis account of the creation have no material difference, as they did for earlier commentators, 'since "likeness" is merely added by way of exposition',¹⁸ in the manner of a Hebraic emphasis. As regards the body, he states: 'I deny not, indeed, that external shape, insofar as it distinguishes and separates us from the lower animals, brings us nearer to God.'¹⁹ Nonetheless, for Calvin, as for Aquinas, mankind's primacy is intellectual, 'soulish':

Hence, although the soul is not the man, there is no absurdity in holding that he is called the image of God in respect of the soul; though I retain the principle which I lately laid down, that the image of God extends to everything in which the nature of man surpasses that of all other species of animals.²⁰

Yet 'image' principally refers to those distinctive graces 'in which man excels, and in which he is to be regarded as a mirror of the divine glory'.²¹ These include the knowledge of God, righteousness, and holiness, which we learn from the fact that the apostle specifies these in connection with the renewal of our image. This glory, though lost through sin, was not totally annihilated and destroyed in him,²² yet it was so corrupted that whatever remains is in a state of frightful deformity, no longer the reflection of God's glory.²³ One of the implications of this for Calvin is seen in his extensive discussion of the *sensus divinitatis*, and how it remains in fallen mankind, albeit in a corrupted form leading to idolatry

¹⁶ *Inst.* I.15.3.

¹⁷ *Summa Theologiae*, 1a 93. 2 and 6.

¹⁸ *Inst.* I.15.3.

¹⁹ *Inst.* I.15.3.

²⁰ *Inst.* I.15.3.

²¹ *Inst.* I.15.4.

²² *Inst.* I.15.4.

²³ *Inst.* I.15.4.

and religious deformities of all kinds. The knowledge of heavenly life is engraved upon the soul of fallen mankind, but it is distorted through sin and takes on mutilated shapes.²⁴ The ‘admirable gifts’ seem to include the bounding and tempering of his powers: his reason and senses.

Here’s another description of the original condition:

Therefore, God has provided the soul of man with intellect, by which he might discern good from evil, just from unjust, and might know what to follow or to shun, reason going before with her lamp; whence philosophers, in reference to her directing power, have called her *to hegemonikon*. To this he has joined will, to which choice belongs. Man excelled in these noble endowments in his primitive condition, when reason, intelligence, prudence, and judgment not only sufficed for the government of his earthly life, but also enabled him to rise up to God and eternal happiness.²⁵

The odd man out in this arrangement was the will, which was placed in a ‘slippery’ position with a weak power, an ‘intermediate and even transitory will’. It could have been created stronger, ‘more excellent’.²⁶ The reason for having created mankind with his will in this unstable condition is according to Calvin largely hidden in the divine counsel.²⁷

Calvin continues his account of the image and its various components in his discussion of the Fall and its consequences at the beginning of book II. The Fall is an affliction. By it ‘man is corrupted by a natural viciousness, but not by one which proceeded from nature . . . it was rather an adventitious event which befell man, than a substantial property assigned to him from the beginning’.²⁸ So corruption is not natural in the sense of being original, but it is, Calvin says, natural in another sense, in that all men (in Adam) have it ‘by a hereditary law’. Fallen mankind does not acquire corruption some time after birth, by the influence of the environment or by example, but each person enters the world already corrupted, contra the Pelagians and the Manichees.²⁹ Nevertheless, though Calvin rejects the exegesis of the earlier interpreters, he recognizes the doctrinal substance that the earlier commentators thought the distinction pointed to.

In Calvin’s account of the Fall and what this revealed about the character and more particularly the structure of human nature it is necessary to distinguish between historical sequence and logical order. Mankind is created in the image of God, and falls, but paradoxically Calvin’s treatment of the Fall discloses a fuller account of the metaphysics of human nature

²⁴ *Inst.* I.15.6.

²⁵ *Inst.* I.15.8.

²⁶ *Inst.* I.15.8.

²⁷ *Inst.* I.15.8.

²⁸ *Inst.* II.1.11.

²⁹ *Inst.* II.1.11.

(which might otherwise have been unapparent). Particularly, it discloses what is essential and what is accidental in human nature. It is not that mankind had (at t₁) a nature created pure which then (at t₂) was given a supernatural gift, the two elements combining to provide mankind made in the image of God. Rather, mankind was created as one individual substance in the image of God, or, perhaps, bearing in mind Calvin's dualism, as two conjoined substances, though as we have noted Calvin focuses on the mind as the source of the image. Created in this fashion, men and women possess both essential and accidental features. The accidental features, or some of them at any rate, were lost in the Fall, transmuted into contrary accidental features. What was lost was supernatural and (from a metaphysical point of view) 'adventitious', but the wrench was such that what was left, what was natural, original, and essential, was also badly affected.³⁰

Calvin is fond of describing the Fall and its consequences in the supernatural–nature language borrowed from Augustine.³¹ Unfortunately for us, however, when Calvin refers to the 'well-known saying' of Augustine 'that man's natural gifts were corrupted by sin, and the supernatural gifts were withdrawn',³² he does not offer a definition of 'supernatural'. Nevertheless, the context makes it pretty clear what Calvin is getting at. He is complaining about a degenerate tradition of interpreting the effects of the Fall upon human nature. Members of this tradition have 'one after the other, gone more widely astray, until the common dogma came to be, that man was corrupted only in the sensual part of his nature, that reason remained entire, and will was scarcely impaired'.³³ It is also clear enough, contrary to this degenerate tradition, that the disordering and corrupting effects of the Fall spread in a serious fashion to all aspects of human nature—a fact recognized (Calvin believes) in patristic and early medieval times, but obscured by later tradition. The organic character of unfallen human nature, though distinguishable as 'natural' and 'supernatural', is here made apparent.

In the discussion of free will which immediately follows, Calvin offers a kind of historical sketch of a gradual decline in what he regards as a true

³⁰ So John Milbank's idea that it is the Calvinist view that as a result of the Fall 'an essentially self sufficient pure nature is totally destroyed' (*The Suspended Middle* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005), 34) is wrong in both respects. For Calvin human nature was not self sufficient and (self sufficient or not) it was not totally destroyed in the Fall.

³¹ *Inst.* II.2.4; see also *Inst.* II.2.12.

³² *Inst.* II.2.12.

³³ *Inst.* II.2.4.

understanding of free will and its loss. A sketch of this sort is fairly unusual in the *Institutes*. It begins with Origen (186–255), with whom Augustine (354–430) agreed in a qualified sense. Bernard (1090–1153), wishing to speak subtly, is obscure. Anselm (1033–1109) has a definition which is well-known though not plain enough. As a consequence, Peter Lombard (c.1100–c.1160) and the scholastics, though generally Augustinian in outlook, ‘bring forward their own ideas’, particularly the idea that the will arises from a combination of understanding and appetite. So Thomas (1224–74) follows this view. Scotus is not mentioned.

Calvin returns to the issue of natural and supernatural gifts at *Institutes* II.2.12. Included in the supernatural gifts, and therefore falling under the scope of the originally granted right ordering of the various powers and faculties of the soul, Calvin now includes the ‘light of faith’ as well as righteousness. When the first man ‘withdrew’ from the kingdom of God, *ipso facto* his righteousness was compromised, and since his withdrawal was a failure of faith, an act of unbelief, faith also failed and mankind became ‘naturally’ distrustful of God’s word. And at the same time soundness of mind and uprightness of heart were taken away. Thus the ‘supernatural gifts’ vanished. Such gifts can only be restored to the race through regeneration.

So the picture is now a little more complex. The loss of the ‘supernatural’, the scope of which we have just noted, has consequences for the meaning of ‘natural’. Calvin does not help us very much with the exact nature of this connection. Mankind withdraws from the kingdom, and is deprived of spiritual gifts. At the same time soundness of mind and uprightness of heart are withdrawn. The language is interesting; ‘depriving’ and ‘withdrawing’ suggest not an inevitable decline, and the use of two different verbs suggests that there might be a contingent connection between these activities so that, in theory at least, mankind might have been deprived of the supernatural and not the natural. But this is hard to accept, since Calvin more generally seems to suggest a more organic connectedness, with the loss of the one having immediate consequences for the other. One other possibility is an account in terms of supervenience, but this looks too automatic and ‘natural’, for the connection between natural and supernatural would in this case be a natural one. The withdrawing of soundness of mind seems to be a distinct divine act, not a metaphysical consequence of being deprived of the supernatural. Calvin’s view is that this weakening was not a ‘natural’ process, like the example of paralysis given earlier, but it is penal, part of the curse of the Fall.³⁴ In part at least Calvin regards fallen human nature as a

³⁴ e.g. *Inst.* II.1.9.

judicial consequence of man's first disobedience. Nevertheless, this penal aspect is not prominent in his account of the consequences of the Fall in *Institutes* II.2. One might also wonder if the presence of unbelief and disobedience just *was* the depriving and the withdrawing. But Calvin does not seem to say so.

Calvin makes his position clearer regarding the condition of postlapsarian human nature in his remarks on concupiscence.³⁵ For what he means by 'concupiscence' is not an innate and original friction between flesh and spirit, a view common in medievalism, but a conflict that is characteristic only of fallen human nature, and that it is sinful *per se*. But Calvin's point here is to stress that all parts of the soul are afflicted by the Fall, and that the Fall was not due to some original friction in human nature. Augustine called this conflict 'weakness', the weakness of human nature as fallen, becoming sinful only when the mind consents and the will yields. After briefly sketching Augustine's view, Calvin expresses his own view somewhat differently:

We again regard it as sin whenever man is influenced in any degree by any desire contrary to the law of God; no, we maintain that the very pravity which begets in us such desires is sin. Accordingly, we hold that there is always sin in the saints until they are freed from their mortal frame, because depraved concupiscence resides in their flesh, and is at variance with rectitude.³⁶

And he goes on to show that sometimes even Augustine refers to this as sin.³⁷

Consistently with this Calvin defines original sin as

a hereditary depravity and corruption of our nature, extending to all the parts of the soul, which first makes us obnoxious to the wrath of God, and then produces in us works which in Scripture are termed works of the flesh.³⁸

And so we are 'perverted and corrupted in all the parts of our nature'³⁹—the nature that remains following the removal of the supernatural gifts.

Whatever the exact connotation of 'supernatural gifts', it is clear that some such distinction between nature and supernature is *logically* required by Calvin's account of the Fall, as it was in the case of the accounts by Augustine and Aquinas. For the Fall does not literally dehumanize, depriving humankind of its essential nature, for then human beings would become bestial. It is true that occasionally Calvin refers to fallen human nature as 'bestial', but in such places he is talking about the

³⁵ *Inst.* II.1.5.

³⁶ *Inst.* III.3.10.

³⁷ *Inst.* III.3.10.

³⁸ *Inst.* II.1.8.

³⁹ *Inst.* II.1.8.

moral practices of fallen men and women, and not their fallen nature in its essential characteristics. For he is clear that essential features, such as reason and will, remain after the Fall, but that these are corrupted and depraved by it. The supernatural gifts—principally holiness and true righteousness—were from a logical and metaphysical point of view ‘adventitious’, as we have seen, but nevertheless vital from the point of view of mankind’s spiritual health and prospects.

The natural and the supernatural are distinct in a further sense. The presence of the supernatural gifts is all or nothing, which is not to say that if they are present they cannot grow or develop. Their health is kept intact at a kind of threshold, and if it is crossed (as it was in the Fall) this results in their total loss. But a human being could not survive the wiping out of the natural gifts, since they are intrinsic to human nature, essential to it.⁴⁰

As a result of the Fall man’s supernatural gifts are vitiated. To have been shorn of supernatural gifts is to have the ordering of the various powers and abilities removed. This disordering does not only mean that the internal relationship of the features of human nature is spoiled, but ordering here refers to the end for which human beings were created, the service and worship of the Lord. That also fails. The consequence is (to use the language of later Calvinism) ‘total depravity’, where the adjective is understood in an extensive rather than an intensive sense. To illustrate: for Calvin, mankind was created as having a religious nature, a *sensus divinitatis*. That, in the context of his understanding of the Augustinian distinction between the natural and the supernatural, is one of man’s natural features. But as originally given it was ‘ordered’ by the possession of supernatural graces. It gave mankind true, natural knowledge of God, without special revelation except for the permissions and command given to the first pair. In the Fall this ordering is lost. Man continues nevertheless to be a religious being, since it is part of his essence to be such, but now his religiosity is perverted. He manufactures idols. Writing of fallen mankind he says:

True! he has a mind capable of understanding, though incapable of attaining to heavenly and spiritual wisdom; he has some discernment of what is honourable; he has some sense of the divinity, though he cannot reach the true knowledge of God. But to what do these amount? They certainly do not refute the doctrine of Augustine—a doctrine confirmed by the common suffrages even of the

⁴⁰ *Inst.* II.2.12.

Schoolmen, that after the fall, the free gifts on which salvation depends were withdrawn, and natural gifts corrupted and defiled.⁴¹

So, to use a modern distinction, Calvin is not arguing that the ‘natural’ as it was created is equivalent to the ‘secular’—a set of powers that are at best neutral as between the claims of theism and atheism, say. No, man’s nature is intrinsically religious, intrinsically orientated to the knowledge of God, possessing the *semen religionis*, which was ordered in unfallen mankind but became perverted (not extinguished) in fallen mankind. An apple tree bears apple leaves even though its blossom-and-fruit-producing powers have been extinguished by the blight. And similarly with the other aspects of mankind’s original powers. The ‘ordering’ is not therefore a religious icing on a secular cake, it is the ordering of a nature which is, for Calvin, essentially religious.

In writing as he does of the distinction between nature and supernature, it is clear that Calvin is not supposing that there is a temporal lag between mankind as endowed with the ensemble of powers that constitute his nature, and the supernatural gifts, the proper ordering of them. There was no time when mankind existed in a ‘natural’ form alone, and there could not be such a time, for the simple reason that his essence, left to itself, was liable to immediate disorder. From the start, therefore, it needed the benefit of the supernatural, exceptional, gifts of God. To illustrate further (although in a way that is anachronistic to Calvin), were he invited to graft his account of man in the image of God on to an account of evolution by natural selection, then he would have to say that at a point in the evolutionary chain a pair became human, and that that change involved not simply the acquisition/donation of a ‘nature’ including a religious sense, but a supernatural ordering of it too. ‘Supernatural’ therefore does not equate with ‘religious’ but with ‘soundly religious’.

As might be expected, the account of the nature of the image of God in the *Commentary on Genesis* is not as full as that in the *Institutes*. Nonetheless, Calvin makes some additional points, and there are some differences. There is the same stress on the Fall bringing disorder to the soul; if anything there is a stronger sense than in the *Institutes* that the image of God is destroyed by the Fall; and there is an alternative account of the distinction between image and likeness.

Calvin insists in more than one passage that the image of God is destroyed. ‘But now, although some obscure lineaments of that image are found remaining in us; yet are they so vitiated and maimed, that they

⁴¹ *Inst.* II.5.19.

may truly be said to be destroyed. For besides the deformity which everywhere appears unsightly, this evil also is added, that no part is free from the infection of sin.⁴² He also refers to the loss of reason and judgement and the despoiling of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.⁴³ But this has to be interpreted with care. Such terms as ‘destroy’ and ‘loss’ are degreed. Something may be destroyed wholly or partially, suffer greater or lesser loss, and so on. If a tree catches fire, as a result of which nothing remains but ashes and smoke, then the tree is destroyed. Nothing of the tree as a tree remains. But suppose that a part of the circumference of a circle is removed, so that the circle becomes an arc. Is the circle ‘totally destroyed’? Yes and no. It is no longer a circle; but the arc is recognizably part of a circle—an incomplete circle, perhaps. So Calvin’s terms here can certainly be interpreted consistently with his statements in the *Institutes* that reason, a natural gift, could not be completely wiped out.

There is also a stress in the *Commentary on Genesis* on the idea that the image of God consists in the ordering or coordinating of the various faculties of the soul and the body, their ‘attempering’, as the translator puts it:

Thus the chief seat of the Divine image was in his mind and heart, where it was eminent; yet was there no part of him in which some scintillations of it did not shine forth. For there was an attempering in the several parts of the soul, which corresponded with their various offices. In the mind perfect intelligence flourished and reigned, uprightness attended as its companion, and all the senses were prepared and moulded for due obedience to reason; and in the body there was a suitable correspondence with this internal order.⁴⁴

But perhaps the most interesting feature in the *Commentary* is his entertaining of a rather different understanding of the distinction between ‘image’ and likeness’. Whereas in the *Institutes* the distinction is regarded simply as a Hebraism, in his comment on Genesis 1: 26 Calvin is prepared to entertain a rather more scholastic view, the interpretation of the ‘greater part’ of the commentators, that ‘image’ refers to the substance of a person, ‘likeness’ to the accidents. ‘They who would define the subject briefly, say that in the *image* are contained those endowments which God has conferred on human nature at large, while they expound *likeness* to mean gratuitous gifts.’ He distances himself from Augustine’s ‘speculations’ that the image of God in man is an image of the Trinity. Yet, having given this

⁴² *Comm. Gen.* 1: 26.

⁴³ *Comm. Gen.* 3: 6.

⁴⁴ *Comm. Gen.* 1: 26.

view an airing, he at last rejects the ‘common interpretation’, reverting to his view that image and likeness are equivalent terms.⁴⁵

Summarizing, we may say that Calvin’s view of mankind is in the organic-essentialist tradition of Augustine and Aquinas. Man is as his soul is, and essential to the soul are understanding and will.⁴⁶ But these essential properties may be present in different degrees. A man can be more or less intelligent, his will can be stronger or weaker, but which of these they are does not affect his identity and nature as a man. So the strength and health of the essential parts of the soul are a contingent matter. Just as it is essential to a ball that it is round, so the nature of the roundness of a sponge ball is different from the nature of the roundness of a ball-bearing. In addition, at the original creation certain accidental properties were present, divine gifts—righteousness, holiness, the knowledge of God, the image of God. These were lost at the Fall, and with that loss what was essential—human nature—was also corrupted, and so (on one understanding of what Calvin holds), since the possession of the divine image is an all-or-nothing affair, the image was lost, though man’s essential humanity remains, albeit in a degraded state.

‘Nature’ and ‘natural’ are notoriously slippery terms. But from our discussion of Calvin we are able to discern at least three distinct senses of ‘natural’ which he endorses in his account of the nature of mankind and the Fall. In the first, natural is equivalent to intrinsic or essential; this is the most fundamental sense. In addition, the image of God was natural, in that it had its origin together with man’s essential nature, even though it is not natural in the first sense. Having the image of God is thus a complex affair, equivalently described in the two accounts in Genesis as being created in the image of God (Gen. 1: 27) and receiving the ‘breath of life’ (Gen. 2: 7). But the image, though original with man, is not essential to him. Finally, sin is ‘natural’ to fallen man in that it is not acquired after birth but is ‘original’ to the fallen race. By implication, Calvin rejects ‘natural’ in the further sense of ‘secular’. Human nature as created (and as fallen) has as an essential feature the *semen religionis*—pristine at creation, perverted by the Fall. The fact that the natural is only capable of partial obliteration is of considerable importance for an understanding of Calvin’s view of the natural and the consequent distinction between nature and grace: ‘things below’ and ‘things above’.

More generally, Calvin, in common with Augustine and Aquinas, sees an organic, ‘orderly’ connectedness between nature and supernature such

⁴⁵ *Comm. Gen.* 1: 2.

⁴⁶ *Inst.* II.1.1.

that the loss of the supernatural gift immediately resulted in the disordering of nature.

We may be able to understand more about Calvin's trajectory of thought by briefly considering what Francis Turretin has to say about nature, in his more analytical style.⁴⁷ He distinguishes various senses of the term. He has the benefit of the developed Roman Catholic–Protestant controversy, and as a consequence he attempts to express himself more circumspectly than Calvin. In one place he seems deliberately to be avoiding Calvin's language of the supernatural gifts, whether given originally or restored in Christ, as 'adventitious' in that they did not proceed from nature,⁴⁸ presumably because such language would permit a sense of pure nature that is left intact once the original 'adventitious' gifts, righteousness and true holiness, the 'supernatural' gifts, are removed.⁴⁹

So how does Turretin think of the Fall? He thinks in terms of the ensemble of original gifts as being essential to man, and the Fall resulting in the loss of the *bene esse* rather than the *esse* of these gifts. Hence he thinks of evil as a loss, a privation. So he distinguishes between the essence of man and his perfection and integrity. The Fall does not result in the loss of anything essential to man, but the loss of integrity. 'The nature indeed remains mutilated and depraved (since it has lost what perfected it), but is not destroyed as to essence.'⁵⁰ As these issues came to be treated more analytically in Reformed Orthodoxy it became customary to distinguish between the *imago dei* in a narrower and in a wider sense. So in the narrower sense the image can be said to have been lost through the removal of what is 'adventitious' (though this language is dropped, as in Turretin), moral and spiritual qualities of righteousness and true holiness. But in a wider sense, the possession of intellect, reason, and will, the *imago* is retained, because in this sense it is essential to humanity. Nevertheless, the image, understood in the wider sense, is 'depraved', thus retaining the organic connectedness of all aspects of human nature as originally created. Those, like Gisbert Voetius and Peter van Mastricht, for example, who did not observe this distinction, avoided language that suggested that the *imago dei* is lost, claiming that it was spoiled.⁵¹

⁴⁷ *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. G. M. Giger, ed. J. T. Dennison (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P. & R., 1992 7), V.xi.i iv.

⁴⁸ See *Inst.* II.1.11. and *Inst.* II.2.12.

⁴⁹ *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, V.xi.v vi.

⁵⁰ *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, V.xi.xi.

⁵¹ On Voetius and Van Mastricht see Aza Goudriaan, *Reformed Orthodoxy and Philosophy, 1625–1750* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 259–60.

COMMON GRACE AND 'PURE NATURE'

We have noted the development of the idea of common grace by Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck in Holland in the period 1875–1925. In *John Calvin's Ideas* I attempted to argue that the Kuyperian Calvinists were mistaken in claiming that Calvin was unique among the leaders of the Reformation in the way in which he turned his back on natural law and stressed the 'dichotomy' or 'dualism' of nature and grace. He, perhaps even more than Luther, for example, gave a positive account of natural law. In what follows I will concentrate on the work of Bavinck, and show that he has an interpretation of Calvin that is very different from that just given, and that this interpretation is mistaken. I will offer a reason for this mistaken view.

As part of their championing of common grace as a distinctively Calvinian idea, Calvinists such as Kuyper and Bavinck draw the distinction between nature and grace differently from Calvin. For example, in his *Reformed Dogmatics* Herman Bavinck sketches the distinction in the starkest terms. He examines the various views of human nature and the image of God in man,⁵² claiming that 'Roman Catholic Supernaturalism' yielded a 'dual conception of humanity: humankind in the purely natural sense, without supernatural grace, is indeed sinless but only possesses natural religion and virtue and has his destiny on earth; humankind endowed with the superadded gift of the image of God has a supernatural religion and virtue and a destiny in heaven.'⁵³

In Roman Catholicism, Adam's transgression did result for him and his descendants in the loss of the superadded gift; and insofar as God had granted this gift to Adam and he therefore should have enjoyed it, the loss of it can be called culpable. But original sin is no more than this privation; it does not consist in the concupiscence that by itself is not sin, nor in an innate evil of the will, for though the will may have been weakened, it is neither lost nor corrupted. Thus fallen nature is actually totally identical with uncorrupted nature; true, the supernatural gifts have been lost, but the natural gifts continue intact.⁵⁴

⁵² Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (1906 11), trans. John Vriend, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2003 8), ii. 530–62: 'Human Nature'.

⁵³ *Reformed Dogmatics*, ii. 541. While Bavinck recognizes the presence of debates about this in Roman Catholicism, he claims that it was generally accepted among the Scholastics, and though debated by such as Baius, Jansen, and Quesnel, it 'constitutes one of the most important and characteristic loci in Roman Catholicism' (ii. 540). This view recurs as a theme in Bavinck's anthropology; see, for example, *Reformed Dogmatics*, iii. 43, 87, 96, 139, 174.

⁵⁴ *Reformed Dogmatics*, iii. 43.

It seems that the stress on the separateness and intactness of nature even given the Fall, which Bavinck (along with other nineteenth-century Reformed theologians such as Charles Hodge) takes to be the ‘Roman Catholic view’ is in fact based upon a distinction between nature and supernature which is a fairly novel development, in essence a new interpretation of Aquinas in terms of a doctrine of ‘pure nature’. This development was begun by Cardinal Cajetan, and adopted by Counter-Reformation theologians such as Robert Bellarmine. It was resisted not only by the Jansenists, especially by Cornelius Jansenius (1585–1638) himself, but by Augustinians such as Michael Baius.⁵⁵

The novelty of imputing to Calvin a doctrine of common grace *in opposition* to the doctrine of nature and grace, can only be seen for what it is when it is contrasted with this later view. It is much less obvious that it can be contrasted in anything like the same fashion with the views of Augustine or Thomas, or (as I have been arguing) with Calvin himself. We may grant the presence in Calvin’s writing of an understanding of divine goodness and beneficence which is not confined to the Church but from which society (in the most general sense) benefits. Nevertheless, it would be anachronistic in the extreme to read a warrant for the doctrine of common grace in the Kuyperian Calvinist sense back into Calvin’s anthropology, given what he says about the state of human nature after the Fall.

Although we have noted Bavinck’s reading of Roman Catholic views of nature and grace in his *Reformed Dogmatics*, he does not always use the ‘intactness of nature’ misreading of medievalism as a starting point for his consideration of the novelty and distinctiveness of Calvin’s view of common grace. In the article ‘Calvin and Common Grace’, in which he stays very close to Calvin as a primary source, and refers extensively to the *Institutes*, he develops the idea of common grace in a manner that is more internal to Calvin’s own thought. In the course of his treatment he notes that in Calvin’s view of the Fall there is not a complete obliteration of nature:

The supernatural gifts have been lost, and the natural gifts have become corrupted, so that man by nature no longer knows who and what God seeks to be to him. Still these latter gifts have not been withdrawn entirely from man. Reason and judgment and will, however corrupt, yet, in so far as they belong to man’s nature, have not been wholly lost . . . Men carry in themselves the principles of

⁵⁵ See De Lubac, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, and Stone, ‘Michael Baius’. As far as I can tell Calvin does not mention either Baius or Cajetan – certainly not in connection with these issues.

the laws which are to govern them individually and in their association with one another. They agree in regard to the fundamentals of justice and equity, and everywhere exhibit an aptness and liking for social order.⁵⁶

And later he says that under the guidance of the divine Word Calvin

found the will of God revealed not merely in Scripture, but also in the world, and he traced the connection and sought to restore the harmony between them. Under the guidance of the divine Word he distinguished everywhere between the institution of God and human corruption, and then sought to establish and restore everything in harmony with the divine nature and law. Nothing is unclean in itself; every part of the world and every calling in life is a revelation of the divine perfections, so that even the humblest day-laborer fulfils a divine calling.⁵⁷

There is nothing here that is inconsistent with thinking of common grace as an aspect of nature preserved by the goodness of God, and indeed by the persistence of natural law. But in general the Kuyperian Calvinists make a sharp distinction between the medieval contrast between nature and grace and Calvin's idea of common grace.

According to writers such as De Lubac and Stone, the idea of 'pure nature', the brainchild of Cajetan, is that of a neutral, secular nature which is contingently connected to supernature and which might have existed (and perhaps for a time did exist) apart from these gifts. As already noted, this is later taken up by Counter-Reformation theologians such as Robert Bellarmine to counter the views of the Reformers and especially of Jansenius, and Jansenists such as Pasquier Quesnel (1634–1719). According to De Lubac the idea of pure nature is that of a created nature that is self-sufficient and entire. Grace was not needed for nature to raise itself (or be raised) to God. In addition, in De Lubac's view the position of the Counter-Reformation theologians led to an overreaction in a direction which gave support to the intactness of human nature after the Fall, in effect a much more positive, non-Augustinian anthropology, the two-parts view, as we earlier called it.

Cajetan's view was that it is possible to conceive of a creation in a state of pure nature, according to which mankind had a lesser end than the vision of God, an end determined solely by the character of these natural gifts. 'Cajetan and more recent theologians considered a third state that they called purely natural, which although in fact it did not exist, nevertheless can be thought to be possible.'⁵⁸

⁵⁶ 'Calvin and Common Grace', *Princeton Theological Journal*, 7/3 (1909), 454–5.

⁵⁷ 'Calvin and Common Grace', 464.

⁵⁸ Suarez, quoted by Stone at p. 72.

However, while it is important to stress that creation in such a state was reckoned an unactualized possibility, Cajetan argued that the Fall resulted in the loss of the supernatural gifts, leaving a person in such a natural state in which he was able to act in a morally significant way by the exercise of his free will. So there is no question, even for Cajetan, of man as created first existing in a state of pure nature, and then, later, being granted the *donum superadditum*. The addition of the supernatural gifts and graces is not a later event. Nonetheless, when considering the Fall and its effects, mankind is left in a 'state of nature' after the event of the Fall, carrying with it the capacity to intend and to fulfil lesser ends. So in this sense the Fall left human nature 'intact'.⁵⁹

What is crucial for us is the postulation of a 'natural end' for human beings, one which was distinct from any 'supernatural' end, developed by Cajetan as a way of understanding Thomas.⁶⁰ On this view, to mean that mankind has a natural capacity for God comes down to the view that mankind is intellectual, and that intellect is a necessary condition for the vision of God to which a person may be elevated by God. In this sense we each have a natural potency for God.

Baius's account was starkly different, as was that of Dominic de Soto (1499–1560), whose method was more scholastic, as opposed to Baius's traditional Augustinianism. According to Baius it is wrong to think of the addition or removal of supernature, making possible the intactness of the lower level. To be natural is to be in accordance with true nature, to have a 'natural' appetite for God which is intrinsic to being created in the divine image and for the fulfilment of mankind's true end, which is the knowledge and service of God, and ultimately, therefore, the vision of God.⁶¹

Although Baius calls the endowments of man's original state 'natural', he does not mean that they emanate from the nature of man, in the manner in which essential human characteristics, such as body, soul, intellect and will might be said to do. Rather, he intends that they are directly granted by God and, as such, are divine gifts rather than human propensities or accomplishments.⁶²

So to be created in the image of God is to be created with 'natural' virtues in this sense. Evil is thus a privation of the natural. Hence the idea of pure nature as a separable state is 'chimerical'.⁶³ This 'privation' view of the Fall

⁵⁹ For Cajetan's position in more detail see Stone 71 2.

⁶⁰ Stone 70.

⁶¹ See Stone on Baius (p. 59) and Soto (p. 75). According to Stone, Soto thought of such a state of nature as human nature as the pagans conceived it (p. 74).

⁶² Stone 60.

⁶³ Stone 60.

has adverse consequences for an Augustinian understanding of grace and free will,⁶⁴ and so tended to undermine opposition to the Reformation in these areas. Soto's position⁶⁵ is remarkably like Calvin's contrast between 'things below' and 'things above', a contrast which is the result not of the Fall, but of the existence of ends which are temporal and those which are eternal. So it is intrinsic. Nonetheless, in fact man is fallen, and the Fall adversely affected the pursuit of these separate ends.

Baius was accused of denying that any possibility of good might come from man's nature alone. Would Calvin have concurred? In the first place, the distinction that Calvin draws between the human essence and the adventitious gift of the divine image is a merely conceptual distinction. He never envisages a period, however short, in which newly created mankind lives at the level of 'pure nature', and certainly he does not envisage a life of 'pure nature' *after* the Fall. What he does say, as we have seen, is that human nature is spoiled by the loss of the image, understood not as its total obliteration but as the loss of its wholeness and integrity, leaving nature intact. Obviously at this point there is room for a good deal of diversity of interpretation of the exact extent and character of the 'image' that remains—and consequently diversity regarding the character of the recovery. As far as Calvin himself is concerned, the renewal that occurs through regeneration not only extends to the renewal of the image in the sense understood by Calvin (a sense that as we have seen he draws from what he takes Paul to be saying about 'the new man' in Ephesians and Colossians), but reaches to the recovery of full intellectual and moral integrity of human nature (understood in essentialist terms familiar from our earlier discussion) lost as a consequence of the loss of the image. Such a full recovery of human nature is realized only in the life to come, its lustre 'displayed in heaven.'⁶⁶

On the view of Cajetan and others, taken up at the Counter-Reformation, it makes much more sense, indeed perfect sense, to suppose that whatever the effects of the Fall it left human nature unaffected, and that the relation between nature and grace may be understood in terms of two distinct, contingently connected layers, the ground floor of nature and the upper floor of grace, rather than the more organic interrelatedness that we have noted in Augustine and Aquinas, and of course in Calvin. On the two-floor view the upper floor may be removed without affecting the internal character of the lower floor in a way that it is not possible to envisage in the more organic understanding, except that, understandably enough, the goals of lower-floor human nature cannot be as elevated as those of the two floors

⁶⁴ Stone 62.

⁶⁵ As noted by Stone at pp. 74–5.

⁶⁶ *Inst.* I.15.4.

together. For Calvin and his Augustinian forebears the idea of the supernatural is as a set of properties with which mankind is endowed, which they perverted, and which are regained in Christ. Supernatural in its restorative sense for Calvin has to do primarily with the salvific, and to a lesser extent with the godly pursuit of 'things below'. It is not a necessary ontological feature of humanity which may be used to characterize human cultural products.

We began this chapter with a brief look at Calvin's expressions about general grace and the gifts of God to particular human beings. We are now able to see that these expressions do not betoken a distinctly new Calvinistic outlook which has revolutionary implications for the relation of the Christian faith to culture, but are reasonably consistent with the views of medieval Catholicism on human nature and the effects of sin upon it. The structure of ideas is essentially the same, even though in some respects, notably in the more intense language that Calvin used regarding the effects of sin upon fallen human nature, there are differences of emphasis between Calvin and the outlook of his medieval forbears.

We have also noted that when Bavinck adheres closely to Calvin, as in his paper 'Calvin and Common Grace', he avoids portraying his understanding of common grace as being in opposition to the 'dichotomy' of nature and grace and thus as potentially revolutionary. However, in an earlier address, 'Common Grace', given in 1894,⁶⁷ the doctrine of common grace is clearly expressed as a reaction to the supposed medieval dichotomy. Considering this will bring us to the heart of Bavinck's mistake.

BAVINCK'S MISTAKE

Bavinck observes that despite the popular view of Calvin (and the Puritans and other Calvinist groups) as a killjoy it is 'striking that Calvin in his system accorded a place and worth to the natural life that find no counterparts in other conceptions of the Christian religion'. He 'discovered' the doctrine of common grace, and thus conceived of the relation of nature to grace far more profoundly than did other Reformers such as Luther and Zwingli.⁶⁸ He made this discovery despite his Augustinian stress on the need for God's sovereign grace in the reconciliation of the guilty to God and their renewal in God's image. In this situation '[t]here could be no talk of good works without faith'.⁶⁹ However, it was undeniable to the

⁶⁷ Herman Bavinck, 'Common Grace', trans. Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, *Calvin Theological Journal*, 24 (1989), 35–65.

⁶⁸ 'Common Grace', 39.

⁶⁹ 'Common Grace', 50.

Reformers that many good things are accomplished by those who do not enjoy God's grace in a salvific sense. So there was tension. According to Bavinck, Luther removed that tension by assigning salvation to a 'higher' sphere, the everyday life to a 'lower' sphere, but Calvin's logical and systematic approach could not stomach such a 'dualism'.

The idea of nature and grace being a 'dualism' or 'dichotomy' came to be a fundamental aspect of the outlook of the Kuyperian Calvinists. Bavinck puts it this way: 'In the affairs of the natural life, man's reason and will remain free and capable of some good, but in spiritual matters they are utterly blind and powerless.' Such a dualism is allegedly rooted in Catholicism:

According to the viewpoint of Rome, there exist in the divine mind two conceptions of man and thus also a double moral law, two sorts of love, and a twofold destination or goal. God first created man as an earthly, sensuous, rational, and moral being *in puris naturalibus* [in a purely natural state]. To be sure, to this he added the divine image, the *donum superadditum* [superadded gift]; but this was soon lost through sin. Original sin thus consists entirely or almost entirely in the loss of the *donum superadditum* and in the reversion to the state of nature, in *puris naturalibus*. Apart from the harmful influence of his social environment, man is still born in a condition like that of Adam before the fall, and lacking the *donum superadditum*.⁷⁰

In 'Natural Law Ethics: An Appraisal', writing over a hundred years later, the Kuyperian Calvinist Henry Stob faithfully echoes this view:

The first of these mistakes is a philosophical dualism that unwarrantably separates nature and grace. According to classic Roman Catholic teaching, nature and grace are two distinct and independent magnitudes whose acknowledged togetherness in given instances never goes beyond external juxtaposition. Grace, when

⁷⁰ 'Common Grace', 45. In the nineteenth century such a view was held by Calvinists on both sides of the Atlantic. So Charles Hodge, with warrant from Bellarmine, expresses the essence of the difference between the 'Romish Church' and Protestantism as follows: 'Original righteousness is asserted by Protestants to the natural first with the view of denying that human nature as at first constituted involved the conflicting principles of flesh and spirit as represented by Bellarmine, and that the *pura naturalia*, or simple principles of nature as they existed in Adam, were without moral character; and secondly to assert that the nature of man as created was good, that his reason was enlightened and his will and feelings were conformed to the moral image of God' (*Systematic Theology* (1875; repr. London: Clarke, 1960), ii. 104-5). The view of W. G. T. Shedd, who was a close contemporary of Hodge, is more illuminating: 'The Tridentine anthropology is a mixture of Pelagianism and Augustinianism. God created man "in puris naturalibus", without either holiness or sin. This creative act, which left man characterless, God followed with another act by which he endowed man with holiness. . . . In the Modern church, the Calvinists and early Lutherans adopted the Augustinian view' (*Dogmatic Theology* (1888; repr. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1969), ii. 96).

operative, does 'perfect' nature, but it does so only by addition, not by penetration. Therefore any 'whole' that nature and grace may constitute becomes not a true unity, but a sum. So, for example, the first man, Adam, was in his sinless fellowship with God a 'combination' of human nature and grace 'superadded', and his fall effected not the inner spoliation of his human nature but merely the external subtraction of the *superadditum*, leaving his nature deprived but basically unimpaired.⁷¹

So the 'dualism' in question is a two-track view of human life, expressed according to Bavinck with the help of the sharp contrast between nature and supernature. The distinction is clearly not that of logical opposition, for nature and supernature, though distinct ideas, are not contradictory, but the 'dichotomy' is that there are two tracks irreconcilably existing side by side, the track of nature and the track of grace. Bavinck's story is that Calvin's logical spirit was unable to rest content with this state of affairs, and he 'comes to distinguish between general and special grace, between the working of the Spirit in all creation and the work of sanctification that belongs only to those who believe'.⁷² But it is not clear why this is not a case of replacing one dualism with another. The alleged principle of harmonization is grace. Unlike the nature–supernature dichotomy, which explains the presence of goodness outside the Church in terms of a sort of free-standing view of nature, intact even when the *superadditum* is lost, on Calvin's view (according to Bavinck) the presence of such goodness is harmonized, the duality or dichotomy is removed, once it is understood that such natural goodness is seen as a gift of grace, common grace, and not the special grace which brings regeneration and new life in Christ. 'All that is good and true has its origin in this grace, including the good we see in fallen man. The light still does shine in the darkness. The spirit of God makes its home and works in all the creation.'⁷³

Whether or not this is Calvin's view, despite the revolutionary claims made for common grace it is not easy to see how invoking it in the sense just described removes the dichotomy, or even reduces it. As G. C. Berkouwer astutely observes, the Roman Catholic teaching of the *donum superadditum* 'raises the same problem as that which came to the fore in the doctrine of

⁷¹ *Calvin Theological Journal*, 20 (1985), 61. According to Peter Heslam, Calvin formulated his doctrine of common grace 'in opposition to the classical medieval scholastic view of sin and the intellect: the scholastic *lumen naturale*, the natural light of reason, he taught was "blind" or "extinguished"', citing *Institutes* II.1.9, II.2.18, 24 (*Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 177).

⁷² 'Common Grace', 51.

⁷³ 'Common Grace', 51.

common grace'.⁷⁴ For on this view the terms 'nature' and 'supernature' are replaced by 'common grace' and 'special grace'. Of course both the goodness of culture outside the Church and the goodness of saving grace are species of 'grace'. But then 'nature' and 'supernature' are both species of 'nature'. However, it is easy to see how the 'dualism' might be removed. Suppose that supernature supplanted nature, suppose that one adopted some kind of supernaturalist universalism, in which everything, both in the Church and in the wider culture, is down to saving grace in Christ, then the dichotomy would go. Perhaps this is the thrust of Barthianism. Or suppose that one explained the activity of the Church, and the regenerating work of the Spirit, in naturalistic terms, the dichotomy would also go, the natural explaining the supernatural and eliminating it. Perhaps this is what classical Pelagianism or theological liberalism of a naturalistic kind in effect propose. In other words, to remove the 'dualism' one needs a reductionist strategy which goes either from the supernatural to the natural, or vice versa. But as presented by Bavinck the change from the language of two kinds of nature to that of two kinds of grace is purely semantic and the 'dichotomy' remains.

There is evidence that despite the claims just noted Bavinck realizes that common grace cannot be the whole story to removing the 'dichotomy'. For he attempts to mitigate the remaining 'dualism' by distinguishing relative and absolute versions of it.⁷⁵ According to Bavinck, for Rome supernature starts and ends in mystery, and grace is necessary to secure the supernatural end for mankind that God destined. So on the 'Roman position a complete and genuine reconciliation of nature and grace is not possible. But the Reformation saw this relation differently, and sought the essence of special revelation not in the mystery, but in grace.'⁷⁶ But why this softens or relativizes the dualism is not at all clear.

In view of Calvin's repeated reference to Augustine's saying that 'pleases' him—that the natural gifts were corrupted in man through sin, but that his supernatural gifts were stripped from him⁷⁷—it is quite extraordinary that Bavinck should say that the Reformation view was the precise opposite.

Bavinck alleges that the Reformers' opposition was primarily directed against the scholastic thesis: 'While the supernatural qualities are lost, the natural ones still remained whole.' But, as we have seen, according to Calvin, rightly or wrongly, Lombard and the scholastics, following Augustine, teach

⁷⁴ *Man: The Image of God*, trans. Dirk W. Jellema (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1962), 162.

⁷⁵ 'Common Grace', 56.

⁷⁶ 'Common Grace', 56–7.

⁷⁷ *Inst.* II.2.4, II.2.12, II.2.16.

something that is quite at odds with this; namely, that the natural gifts were corrupted! The mystery is compounded by the fact that a few sentences later Calvin is cited as endorsing Augustine's view. Bavinck must surely have recognized that within the Reformed teaching there was a distinction between what was lost and what was left, and that the early Reformed theologians, including Calvin, used essentialist language in order to understand this.⁷⁸ But of course in talking of the essence that remained Calvin did not regard it as untainted. The essential features of human nature are degraded, as we have seen.

In developing his case some of Bavinck's language is rather imprecise. He says:

From the beginning, however, Reformed theologians, incorporated also the essence of man in the image of God. Heppe is wrong when he asserts that Calvin and Zanchius did not teach this. While Calvin does make a distinction between the soul's substance and its gifts, he expressly states that the image of God consisted in 'those marks of excellence with which God had distinguished Adam over all living creatures', and that consequently it also consists in integrity. All the Reformed theologians agreed with this, only Coccejus, presenting an alternative view, taught that while the soul and its properties were presupposed by the image of God, they were not its content but only the canvas, so to speak, on which God painted his image.⁷⁹

But, as we have seen, Calvin's view seems to fall between these two extremes. The 'marks of excellence' are defaced in the Fall, and in that sense lost, and this loss in turn affects the 'canvas', the operation of man's essence, human nature, the intellect, the will, and so on, without resulting in its complete loss, which would be impossible without utter dehumanization. He does seem to recognize some vestige of the image of God in fallen man, as his comments on Genesis 9: 6 show, while in his remarks on the words of Aratus (Acts 17: 28) he makes reference to the image of God being 'almost blotted out'.⁸⁰ But he takes the reference to 'image' in 1 Corinthians 11: 7 to refer not to mankind's creation in the image of God but to 'the order of marriage'. 'He does not treat here of innocence and holiness, which are equally becoming in men and women, but of the distinction, which God has conferred upon the man, so as to have superiority over the woman.'⁸¹ And on James 3: 9 he says: 'For since God ought to be blessed in all his works, he ought to be so especially as to men, in whom his image and glory peculiarly shine

⁷⁸ *Reformed Dogmatics*, ii. 548.

⁷⁹ *Reformed Dogmatics*, ii. 550.

⁸⁰ *Comm. Acts* 17: 28.

⁸¹ *Comm. 1 Cor.* 11: 7.

forth.⁸² Each of these exegetical comments is consistent with Calvin's idea as put forth in the *Institutes* that some vestiges of God's image remain in that an element of its necessary conditions, the presence of human nature, remains, though this remaining nature is vitiated by sin. While, of course, Calvin speaks of the essence of humanity and what is adventitious, nevertheless in man as created these two elements existed in organic harmony, which the Fall disrupted. For 'though the primary seat of the divine image was in the mind and the heart, or in the soul and its powers, there was no part even of the body in which some rays of glory did not shine'.⁸³ 'The image of God was not utterly effaced and destroyed in him, it was, however, so corrupted, that any thing which remains is fearful deformity'.⁸⁴

So what is the explanation of Bavinck's mistake? It is, I believe, that he was working with a Counter-Reformation view of nature and grace, taken over not from the patristic and medieval organic-essentialist view, but from Cajetan and as adopted by Bellarmine, and read back into medievalism and into Calvin's own situation: a classic case of anachronism. Whether or not this is the whole explanation, it is fairly clear that Bavinck's understanding of the Roman Catholic view of the distinction between nature and grace draws that distinction in much sharper lines than it is found historically in Augustine and Aquinas. Indeed, it is another account altogether.

On Calvin's position, to say that a human ability or activity is the effect of common grace or that it is the working of nature, human nature, are thus two ways of saying the same thing, or almost the same thing. What the phrase 'common grace' brings out is that these abilities and activities, found in fallen and unregenerate human nature, are the result of undeserved, divine goodness. The effects of the Fall on human nature could have been worse than they are, and why they are not worse than they are is due to 'common grace'. The concept of nature looks at the same phenomenon from another angle, focusing on the persisting structures of human life. How are the gifts of common grace expressed? In the workings of human nature, created in the image of God and now fallen and suffering loss and perversion as a consequence. The Fall has resulted in loss and perversion but, due to divine goodness, not in obliteration. So these expressions, 'common grace' and 'nature', are for Calvin complementary, or at worst overlapping, descriptions of the same phenomena.

⁸² *Comm.* James 3: 9.

⁸³ *Inst.* I.15.3.

⁸⁴ *Inst.* I.15.4.

CALVIN: 'THINGS BELOW' AND 'THINGS ABOVE'

As we have seen, one of the premises for Bavinck's development of the idea of common grace as distinctively Calvinian is that Calvin's approach to the relation between nature and grace is much more radical than that of Martin Luther, whose solution was simply to assign each to different spheres. But in fact Calvin is very Lutheran in the way in which he sets out the distinction between 'things below' and 'things above', which arises in the *Institutes* in the context of the effects of sin upon human nature. The organization of Calvin's treatment of this is, however, a bit odd. He says that since man's soul consists of understanding and will this is the order in which the effects of sin on human nature will be considered: first the understanding, and then the will.⁸⁵ He considers the understanding in *Institutes* II.2.13–26 and the will in II.2.26–7. But in fact he had already treated the effects of sin on the will in II.2.4–11. Also, the note in Battles's translation⁸⁶ that Calvin's treatment of the will which begins here is continued through II.2–5 is not quite accurate, since Calvin returns in Chapter 3 to considering 'both parts of his soul'.⁸⁷ So we might say that his discussion of the effects of sin on the will occurs before and after his discussion of the effects of sin on the understanding. Though the discussion of the will is relevant, nevertheless it is in his discussion of the effects of sin on the understanding that his distinction between 'things below' and 'things above' emerges much more clearly:

To charge the intellect with perpetual blindness so as to leave it no intelligence of any description whatever, is repugnant not only to the Word of God, but to common experience. We see that there has been implanted in the human mind a certain desire of investigating truth, to which it never would aspire unless some relish for truth antecedently existed. There is, therefore, now, in the human mind, discernment to this extent, that it is naturally influenced by the love of truth, the neglect of which in the lower animals is a proof of their gross and irrational nature. Still it is true that this love of truth fails before it reaches the goal, forthwith falling away into vanity . . . however, man's efforts are not always so utterly fruitless as not to lead to some result, especially when his attention is directed to inferior objects.⁸⁸

So there is in Calvin's mind an immediate linkage between human nature as skewed by sin, deprived of its supernatural gifts, and the pursuit of things below. Whether or not the human powers that remain after the

⁸⁵ *Inst.* I.15.12.

⁸⁶ *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (London: SCM, 1960), 286 n. 22.

⁸⁷ *Inst.* II.3.1.

⁸⁸ *Inst.* II.2.12 13.

ravages of sin are regarded as 'common grace', they are confined by Calvin to the 'below' and already his contrast between 'things above' and things below' starts to become apparent. And Calvin quickly develops it:

It may therefore be proper, in order to make it more manifest how far our ability extends in regard to these two classes of objects ['superior' and 'inferior'], to draw a distinction between them. The distinction is, that we have one kind of intelligence of earthly things, and another of heavenly things. By earthly things, I mean those which relate not to God and his kingdom, to true righteousness and future blessedness, but have some connection with the present life, and are in a manner confined within its boundaries. By heavenly things, I mean the pure knowledge of God, the method of true righteousness, and the mysteries of the heavenly kingdom. To the former belong matters of policy and economy, all mechanical arts and liberal studies. To the latter belong the knowledge of God and of his will, and the means of framing the life in accordance with them.⁸⁹

Calvin then touches upon the social virtues, and the manual and liberal arts. Do these belong to nature or grace? He links the two in a way that is surprising given his supposed emphasis on common grace in antithesis to nature:

But while these proofs openly attest the fact of a universal reason and intelligence naturally implanted, this universality is of a kind which should lead every individual for himself to recognize it as a special gift of God. To this gratitude we have a sufficient call from the Creator himself, when, in the case of idiots, he shows what the endowments of the soul would be if not pervaded with his light.⁹⁰

Here the language of grace, of 'special gift', is meant to indicate that according to Calvin the gifts that human beings at large enjoy are undeserved. Such skills are not confined to a few, and they are granted where they might equally justly have been withheld, and in some cases are withheld, as with 'idiots'. Since such abilities might have been withheld, and so are undeserved, they are gracious, 'a gratuitous gift of his beneficence to each', given indiscriminately to believer and unbeliever alike. But viewed in a slightly different way, they are 'naturally implanted'. So the use of the term grace is not part of a harmonization of nature and grace in the sense that there is no longer a 'dualism', but indicates that the abilities for use 'below' are also God's gift expressed in naturally implanted reason and intelligence, though a lesser gift than that of salvation through Christ.

Calvin sees the provision of these 'natural' gifts as the work of the Holy Spirit, finding scriptural precedent for this:

⁸⁹ *Inst.* II.2.13.

⁹⁰ *Inst.* II.2.14.

For what is said as to the Spirit dwelling in believers only, is to be understood of the Spirit of holiness by which we are consecrated to God as temples. Notwithstanding this, he fills, moves, and invigorates all things by the virtue of the Spirit, and that according to the peculiar nature which each class of beings has received by the law of creation. But if the Lord has been pleased to assist us by the work and ministry of the ungodly in physics, dialectics, mathematics, and other similar sciences, let us avail ourselves of it, lest, by neglecting the gifts of God spontaneously offered to us, we be justly punished for our sloth.⁹¹

Yet these gifts are ‘unstable and transitory’, and Augustine (and the schoolmen) are once more cited in support of the point that the natural gifts were corrupted after the Fall.⁹² And with regard to the things of God’s kingdom even the wisest of men are ‘blinder than moles’ without the regenerating grace of God’s Spirit.

So Bavinck’s claim that Calvin is more radical than Luther faces an insurmountable obstacle; namely, the fact that Calvin himself makes exactly the Lutheran distinction and develops it at some length, at far greater length than he does his supposedly distinctive idea: a doctrine of ‘common grace’ which overcomes the nature–grace ‘dichotomy’.

As we saw in Chapter 1, in the opening words of book 1 of the *Institutes* Calvin refers not only to our ‘poverty’ and ‘miserable ruin’ but also to the ‘mighty gifts with which we are endowed’ as propelling us to a knowledge of God. Awareness of these gifts immediately tells us that we are the offspring of God, just as awareness of our poverty and miserable ruin tells us that we need the Saviour. Calvin is not one to belittle these gifts; they are to be recognized and admired where they occur, and whoever has such gifts must use and foster them. The gifts are not worthless, nor is it a waste of time for the mind to turn its attention to ‘things below’. But note the terminology: ‘things below’.⁹³

Therefore, lest this prove a stumbling-block to any, let us observe that in man government is twofold: the one spiritual, by which the conscience is trained to piety and divine worship; the other civil, by which the individual is instructed in those duties which, as men and citizens, we are bold to perform . . . the former species has reference to the life of the soul, while the latter relates to matters of the

⁹¹ *Inst.* II.2.16.

⁹² *Inst.* II.2.16.

⁹³ For recent discussion of these themes see David VanDrunen, ‘The Context of Natural Law: John Calvin’s doctrine of the Two Kingdoms’, *Journal of Church and State*, 46 (2004), 503–25; ‘The Two Kingdoms: A Reassessment of the Transformationist Calvin’, *Calvin Theological Journal*, 40/2 (2005), 248–66; ‘Medieval Natural Law and the Reformation: A Comparison of Aquinas and Calvin’, *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 80/1 (2006), 77–98; ‘Abraham Kuyper and the Reformed Natural Law and Two Kingdoms Traditions’, *Calvin Theological Journal*, 42 (2007), 283–307.

present life, not only to food and clothing, but to the enacting of laws which require a man to live among his fellows purely, honourably, and modestly. The former has its seat within the soul, the latter only regulates the external conduct. We may call the one the spiritual, the other the civil kingdom.⁹⁴

Calvin sets considerable store by the activities of those engaged in 'things below'. Mankind tends through natural instinct to foster and preserve society, through fair dealing, and the recognition and respect for law, despite many disputes and quarrels. Human acuteness is to be seen in the arts, and in our talent for undertaking and appreciating them. Literature shows that the mind of man though fallen and perverted is nevertheless clothed with God's excellent gifts.

On such statements from Calvin scholars have endeavoured to build a Calvinistic view of culture, a world-and-life-view. But attention to Calvin's language shows that whatever warrant there is for finding a doctrine of common grace in Calvin, this cannot be the main thing for him. For these gifts, for all their grandeur, concern 'things below', not 'things above', 'earthly things', not 'heavenly things', 'inferior things', that are 'unstable and transitory'.

It is worth noting that for Calvin such a distinction must antedate the Fall. For when the garden was delved by Adam, and Eve spun, they were attending to things below, to what is transitory. No doubt in prelapsarian bliss such mundane tasks were undertaken to the glory of God, out of love for him and service to him. But while the distinction antedated the Fall, the tension and conflict between what is 'below' and what is 'above' is one that arrived at the Fall. This must be remembered even when Calvin uses the distinction in connection with the postlapsarian world.

Take, for example, Calvin's attitude to philosophy. He often writes approvingly of it, or of some of it. As we have seen in the course of this book, he incorporates elements of Stoicism and of Aristotle, and of course Plato, into his thought, or at least permits himself the use of their terms. He writes approvingly not only of the ideas of the philosophers but of the activity of doing philosophy. So in the *Institutes* we find that Calvin is somewhat ambivalent with respect to the value of philosophical discussions about the soul. On the one hand he characteristically wishes to avoid anything that is subtle or speculative, but on the other hand he does not think that philosophical discussions about the soul are worthless. Subtle questions are the province of the philosophers, yet they are not to be entirely repudiated:

⁹⁴ *Inst.* III.19.15.

But I leave it to philosophers to discourse more subtilely of these faculties. For the edification of the pious, a simple definition will be sufficient. I admit, indeed, that what they ingeniously teach on the subject is true, and not only pleasant, but also useful to be known; nor do I forbid any who are inclined to prosecute the study. First, I admit that there are five senses.⁹⁵

Thus, despite his reservations about including philosophical discussion in the *Institutes*, he does nevertheless commit himself to certain philosophical conclusions. At other times he is more scathing of philosophy in general, particularly when the philosophers deal with moral and spiritual matters. But all in all is there an endorsement here of what might be called ‘Christian philosophy’? I do not think there is. Like his mentor Augustine, he sees the value of philosophy to be its service to the Christian religion. It is not to be autonomous, and Christians with philosophical gifts are to respect the mysteries of the Christian faith, resisting the temptation to reduce or smooth these away in the interests of developing a philosophical system.

It might be asked: But if such gifts, and the ability to develop and appreciate them, are instilled in us by the Spirit, as Calvin says they are, is their possession and use not a part of what it means to know God, and to know ourselves, and so at least an aspect of the chief concern of religion? Not according to Calvin. In answering the objection ‘What have those who are utterly estranged from God to do with his Spirit?’ he replies that the Spirit of God is not here to be considered as the Spirit of sanctification. It is in his aspect as Creator, as the one who in the beginning moved on the face of the waters (Gen. 1: 2), that he fills, moves, and quickens all things.

Calvin principally saw himself as setting forth a purer version of the Christian religion than those then current, and ambitiously—and vainly—endeavouring to reform the visible Church, at least the visible Church of the West, in its likeness. To the attaining of this end, the knowledge of God and of ourselves, Christian dogmas—even the dogma of predestination—are subordinate. They are means to ends. By comparison, other ambitions and activities, even though imbued with the Spirit of God and therefore divinely warranted, are inferior—even philosophy.

In drawing this discussion to a conclusion, a couple of objections to what I have been arguing can be anticipated. Perhaps there are more. The first likely objection is that I have been painting a pietistic portrait of John Calvin. I plead ‘not guilty’ to this charge. ‘Pietist’ is a regular term of abuse, a sort of religious swear-word, and it can be taken to mean various things. But if it means holding a religious attitude of withdrawal from ‘the

⁹⁵ *Inst.* I.15.6.

world' because of its capacity to distract us from the life of the soul then Calvin was no pietist and the distinction that he draws between 'things below' and 'things above' was not that of a pietistic Calvin. For, as we have seen, he had a high estimate of the arts and sciences, of the gifts of theoretical thought as well as of leadership, even when he is critical of the empty and worthless things that we can expend our energies on. He was a cultivated, aristocratically minded Frenchman who remained that even when Christ mastered him. He did not take a 'dualistic' attitude to the world and the Church. Rather, he placed a subordinate though real value on what does not directly contribute to the knowledge of God and of ourselves.

Second, it may be said that this is an undogmatic or untheological Calvin. Certainly not. There is no controlling dogma in Calvin, but that does not mean that he did not value dogma! He believed that God has given us the knowledge of himself in Scripture, and that Christians are under an obligation to come to as clear a view as they can of that. However, part of this clarity lies in the discipline of respecting the limits of what God has revealed, and of recognizing that the articulation of Christian dogma is not an end in itself but is subordinate to the main thing.

Finally, is this an 'otherworldly' Calvin? It may well be. For Calvin's understanding of religion is founded on his understanding of God's saving grace in Jesus Christ. All other things take second place, and have this grace as their axis. He did not have such an all-encompassing view of 'religion' as to allow the doctrine of creation to swallow or neutralize the doctrine of redemption. Christianity must not be subordinated to the culture, nor made into a message about culture. If Christ, in his warnings about the danger of planning to build bigger barns, and to neglect the soul, or in his urging on us of the need to find the pearl of great price, is an 'otherworldly' Christ, then so was Calvin an otherworldly theologian. Nevertheless, as we have seen, Calvin does not neglect culture, he does not fail to praise it, nor to be fascinated by it.

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