That Word Above all Earthly Powers:

The Metaphysics of Creation and Reformed Theology

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PG Thesis

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Introduction

Is there a reformed doctrine of creation? This is not to ask whether reformed theology offers an account of origins.[1] Rather, the question is whether there is in reformed theology an answer to the question of what it means to say that we and the universe are "created." Does it provide an answer to the question of whether the world has meaning and purpose beyond brute fact?

In a short volume on the Thirty-Nine Articles, Oliver O'Donovan writes that he cannot help but be "uneasy" at the "omission" of the doctrine of creation.[2] As he expands on this he extends the lacunae further, to "later Protestant theology":

> In Lutheranism creation became assimilated to the law, and was consequently contrasted rather too sharply with the gospel. In continental Calvinism the doctrine was on the whole well taught; but in the Puritan Calvinism of the seventeenth-century English-speaking world creation became assimilated to providence and so changed its character completely.[3]

For O'Donovan, the driving force that displaces the doctrine of creation from reformed theology is a premature focus on sin and salvation, without first attending to the created order that is disordered by human rebellion and toward the restoration of which God's saving acts are oriented. This contrasts strongly with the patristic habit of working out very thoroughly the doctrine of creation as

[1] Westminster Confession of Faith, as adopted by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (Willow Grove, Pennsylvania: The Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2005), hereafter WCF, IV.1.
[2] Oliver O'Donovan, *On the Thirty-Nine Articles: Conversations with Tudor Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 2011), 63.
[3] O'Donovan, *On the Thirty-Nine Articles*, 63. O'Donovan also allows an exception for Calvin in his discussion of the effect of the Reformation upon science.

an extension of the doctrine of God, now in relation to his creatures, as a controlling framework that guides whatever may be said of redemption.

> Instead of a strong recovery of the patristic *creatio ex nihilo*, what the Reformation as a whole offers us is a gap between God and the world, true, but one which permits of no ordered perceptions of the world, because that is characterized solely by sin and fallenness. The opposition of God and the world becomes swallowed up into the opposition of good and evil.[4]

The main argument of this thesis is that a robust doctrine of creation is essential to primary concerns of reformed theology. I argue that such a robust doctrine of creation is found in the synthesis of Platonic and Aristotelian thought with Christian doctrine, worked out over the first millennium of Christian history and found in its fully developed form in the participatory ontology of the metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas, a figure who has been received with varying degrees of appreciation and suspicion by reformed theologians throughout the past five hundred years. Evaluating the argument for the whole of reformed theology would be well beyond the scope of a single volume; here we focus on the key doctrines of justification by faith and the providence of God. We have chosen these doctrines in order to focus on two areas of central concern to the reformers and the succeeding reformed tradition, notwithstanding its diversity across many other doctrinal areas, and even with regard to the precise characterization of these two.[5] As to the relationship between the doctrines of creation and these key reformed concerns: the argument is twofold.

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[4] O'Donovan, *On the Thirty-Nine Articles*, 64. Below we will see several examples of reformed figures that conflate the ontological gap between the infinite and finite and the moral gap between a holy God and fallen humanity, in particular Karl Barth.

[5] In other words, this dissertation makes no attempt to characterize the whole of the reformed tradition. As will be described in greater detail in Chapter 1, we will focus narrowly on these two doctrines – justification by faith and providence – as they have been distilled in the "mainstream"

On the one hand, I will seek to show that in the absence of a robust doctrine of creation, reformed theologians have at times painted themselves into theological corners, entangling themselves in theological aporia, most characteristically those which evacuate the creature of creaturely agency and integrity, raising suspicions as to whether we can truly say that God has created – that is, given rise to an order of being truly distinct from himself – at all. My approach will be to proceed by example, examining the theology of reformed figures, who differ widely from one another in terms of their contexts, interlocutors and primary concerns, but who have in common that their metaphysical assumptions are relatively easy to discern, allowing us to trace the effects of their understanding of creation upon the rest of their theology. I include two figures who reject aspects of Thomas' metaphysics of creation - Jonathan Edwards and Karl Barth – as well as two who retain key components of Thomas' framework, John Calvin and John Owen,[6] whose understanding of providence, I will argue, consequently achieves a

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of reformed theology found in such documents as Heinrich Heppe's *Reformed Dogmatics* and the Westminster Confession of Faith. This way of characterizing the tradition is meant to capture what develops from the thought of early and second-generation reformers such as John Calvin, Peter Martyr Vermigli, and Heinrich Bullinger into what Richard Muller has extensively researched and analyzed as Reformed Orthodoxy in his magisterial *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols., 2nd Edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2006), but which also includes more recent adherents to the tradition such as Jonathan Edwards and Karl Barth. At no point in the development of this tradition, even its earliest stages, can it be considered a monolith. Our focus on justification and providence is intended to train our analysis on two doctrines which were largely held in common over a lengthy period encompassing a highly diverse set of figures and streams of reformed thought, without denying the eclecticism of the tradition on any number of highly significant doctrinal *loci*. Our purpose, as we examine reformed figures such as Calvin, Owen, Edwards, and Barth, will be to focus on ways in which their acceptance or rejection of the participatory metaphysic found in Thomas' doctrine of correlated with inconsistencies and aporia in their own thought concerning these two doctrines, especially in the area of providence in the case of the latter two, as we will examine Edwards' tendencies toward panentheistic occasionalism and Barth's proclivity for the notion of *Alleinwirksamkeit*.

[6] It is important to note that we are not claiming that Calvin adopts all of Aquinas' theology or even all of his doctrine of creation, nor that the other three reject all of Thomas' framework. In the case of Calvin, we will show that what he retains is sufficient to shore up his doctrine of creation in a way necessary for the coherence of his understanding of justification and providence. It is also clear that the four figures chosen are not the only four we could approach; in particular, similar examinations could be undertaken for reformed Thomists such as Peter Martyr Vermigli, Stephen Charnock, and others. Silvianne Aspray (née Bürki) has undertaken the former in her as-yet unpublished Cambridge PhD Dissertation, *Metaphysics in the Reformation: A*

stronger sense of both the transcendence of God's sovereign governance of his creatures and the gracious establishment of creaturely freedom. One implication of this line of argument is simply that metaphysics matter to theology.[7]

On the other hand, I will suggest that the crucial lineaments of Thomas' doctrine of creation – its participatory ontology, the real distinction drawn between the perfectly simple triune God[8] and his creatures on whom he bestows the composition of essence and existence, its *ex nihilo* character, and what will come to be called the analogy of being in the 20th-century work of Erich Pryzywara[9] - are more than simply not inimical to reformed theology: they are, in fact, the best and most natural situation in which to work out the key concerns of the reformers. I will propose that justification by faith and the providence of God, as understood by the reformers and the later consolidation of reformed theology in its confessional standards, follow a logic similar to a Thomistic doctrine of creation. This is to be understood not by way of isomorphism or direct correspondence; rather, I suggest that justification by faith depends and naturally unfolds out of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, as both find the source of God's works *ad extra* only in God,[10] while the integrity of divine and human action

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Case Study of Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499-1562), as have Jordan J.Ballor and Simon J.G. Burton in "Peter Martyr Vermigli on Grace and Free Choice: Thomist and Augustinian Perspectives." *Reformation & Renaissance Review* 15/1 (2013): 37-52.

[7] This is an argument made by several of the contributors to Peter M. Candler, Jr., and Conor Cunningham, eds., *Belief and Metaphysics* (London: SCM Press, 2007). Kathryn Tanner points out that particular theological expressions are often heavily influenced by the philosophical milieu in which they are worked out. Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1988), 106.

[8] The title of Stephen D. Long's recent book: Stephen D. Long, *The Perfectly Simple Triune God: Aquinas and His Legacy* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2016).

[9] Erich Przywara, trans. John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart, *Analogia Entis (Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm)*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014).

[10] A crucial difference between the two that must be acknowledged, and which prevents us of thinking of a point-by-point isomorphism between *creatio ex nihilo* and justification by faith, is the forensic nature of the latter. We will develop this further below, but in brief, whereas

treated under the doctrine of providence is best safeguarded by the real distinction and the understanding of the relationship between God and his creatures as a 'mixed' relation, real on the side of the creature but only a relationship of reason on the side of God.[11]

At the heart of Christian talk of creation lies a basic tension: how to speak of a God who is truly transcendent of and in no way dependent upon his creation, but who nonetheless somehow involves himself in creation, first in the act of creation itself and subsequently in the mode of providence, reconciliation, restoration? And how to do this without sealing creation off from interaction

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righteousness is *imputed* in the reformed understanding of justification, creaturely being is *imparted* in creation.

[11] It is this constructive argument that distinguishes this dissertation from former attempts to integrate and find common ground between the thought of Thomas Aquinas and reformed theology. The argument here is not merely that there has been historical integration and commonality between the theology of the reformed tradition and Thomas Aquinas, but rather that there is a specific and natural constructive dependence between the participatory metaphysic underlying Thomas' doctrines of creation and the relationship between creator and creatures, on the one hand, and the integrity and logic of the reformed doctrines of justification by faith and providence, on the other. This goes beyond, but is certainly supported by, the large extant literature examining the historical connections between the two and arguing that many of the reformers adopted, without objection, large swathes of Thomas' thought. The work of Richard Muller will be referred to frequently throughout this dissertation to this effect; see most recently his *Divine Will and Human Choice* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2017). Arvin Vos has likewise argued that Protestant attempts to set Calvin against Thomas are misguided and rest on (a) ignorance of Calvin's dependence on Thomas and the same patristic tradition that Thomas drew on, (b) unfamiliarity with the whole of Thomas' *oeuvre*, and (c) an over-dependence on 16th-17th century readings of Thomas Aquinas by Roman Catholic theologians, which have recently been contested by the 20th century theologians of the *nouvelle théologie* movement such as Henri de Lubac, Jean Daniélou, Marie-Dominique Chenu, and others. Arvin Vos, *Aquinas, Calvin, and Contemporary Protestant Thought: A Critique of Protestant Views on the Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985). More recently (and in a similar vein), James K.A. Smith and Hans Boersma have led attempts to re-evaluate the supposed break with Thomas that took place at the time of the reformation, finding much in common between Aquinas (particularly as read by the *nouvelle théologie* movement) and John Calvin in particular (similar to the account that will be provided in the second chapter of this dissertation), and then offering constructive accounts of how Thomistic metaphysics can inform reformed ecclesiology, particularly in its accounts of Scripture and Sacrament. See James K.A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004) and the conference papers collected in James K.A. Smith and James H. Olthuis, eds., *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition: Creation, Covenant, and Participation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005); Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2011); and Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

with God (as though transcendence merely meant distance), or without the finite creation being overwhelmed and displaced by the infinite creator (as though immanence meant occupation)? Any successful approach, it is clear, would have to avoid placing God and creation alongside one another, occupying a common ontological space, even at opposite ends of a spectrum – but doing so is easier said than done.

One important recent attempt to reconcile this tension in a way consistent with Chalcedonian logic[12] but also building on the linguistic turn in philosophy and theology inaugurated by W.V.O. Quine, Richard Rorty, George Lindbeck and those in the so-called "Yale School" is Kathryn Tanner's 1988 work, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*. She notes that the biblical data generate claims that God transcends the world, and yet is intimately involved in it.[13] These claims pertain both to the relationship between God and his creation as such, and to the relationship of their actions.[14] Tanner argues that such claims can be made coherently so long as they conform to certain "grammatical rules," and seeks to demonstrate a historical tradition within Christianity conforming to such rules.[15]

Tanner argues that such rules must present a "non-contrastive" conception of divine transcendence. Greek thought, she observes, tended to set God and creation in contrast to one another, either setting them alongside one another as beings within a shared cosmos[16] or positioning them as "logical contraries within

[12] While this is not a primary focus of this thesis, we will see at various points that Christological reflection has frequently provided the necessary vocabulary and concepts for Christian reflection on the relation of finite to infinite, creation to Creator.
[13] Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 38.
[14] Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 36.
[15] Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 37.
[16] Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 39.

a single spectrum; this forces an *a priori* separation of the two."[17] Even in those non-contrastive approaches found within Greek philosophy ("specifically, Plato's Idea of the Good in the *Republic* as the unparticipated ground of all Being and Knowing beyond any distinction between Being and Becoming, Pure Forms and the physical world"[18]), she finds that language tends to vacillate between univocal and contrastive modes – she particularly points to Plotinus' emanationist account of divine influence, in which the One is simply the first in a causal chain.[19] Tanner argues that an account in which the divine is not merely first cause but directly and immediately causal of all being of every sort requires an extreme of transcendence that goes beyond contrast.[20]

Tanner specifies her rules as follows:

> First a rule for speaking of God as transcendent vis-à-vis the world: avoid both a simple univocal attribution of predicates to God and world and a simple contrast of divine and non-divine predicates. … The second rule is as follows: avoid in talk about God's creative agency all suggestions of limitation in scope or manner. The second rule prescribes talk of God's creative agency as immediate and universally extensive.[21]

She points to two examples from the early church. "For Irenaeus, what makes God radically different from every other creature – the Fullness without limits of eternal and ingenerate unity – is exactly what assures God's direct and intimate relation with every creature *in the entirety* of its physical and particular being."[22] In Tertullian's reflections on the incarnation, on the other hand, for God to be able to enter into relation with the human in Christ, his distinction from creatures

[17] Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 41.
[18] Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 42.
[19] Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 43.
[20] Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 46.
[21] Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 47.
[22] Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 56.

must be understood as one in which he can do so without compromising the divine nature. "To suppose otherwise and attempt to secure God against a direct relation with creation is to suggest that God is finite, on the same level with things that can be altered by interaction and conditioned by external circumstance."[23] A key feature binding these two together – and which, Tanner, suggests, will be common to any non-contrastive account of the sort she favors – is that God is not characterized in terms of particular natures as opposed to others, as though he were defined in terms of the non-divine. Rather, we say that he is different from the world "through himself."[24]

Tanner's grammatical approach is extremely helpful for identifying what has constituted successful attempts to speak well of God and creation, and where other attempts have gone awry; much in this thesis will corroborate both her findings and her prescriptions. Nonetheless, I will follow a different approach, which pays attention not only to the grammar of Christian theology but to the material content that it must never leave behind, namely God himself (and only then all things in relation to God). In some of the examples that will follow, adherence to rules that meet Tanner's criteria is not sufficient to prevent problems when theology departs from a robust doctrine of God and a metaphysics rich enough to articulate it – which, again, I argue is found in Thomas Aquinas.

The work of the late John Webster constantly pointed toward this sort of approach, indicating the essential and organic relationship between various topics

[23] Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 57.
[24] Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 57.

of Christian doctrine and giving us good reason to expect that deficiencies in the doctrine of creation would manifest in the sorts of aporia we will see in some of our examples. Webster consistently insisted upon a particular prioritization and ordering among doctrines: God before all things in relation to God; the processions of God *ad intra* before the missions of God *ad extra*; among God's works, first the works of nature (creation and providence) and only then the works of grace (reconciliation). A representative essay begins, "The task of the Christian doctrine of creation is rational contemplation of the Holy Trinity in the outward work of love by which God established and ordered creaturely reality, a work issuing from the infinite uncreated and wholly realized movement of God's life in himself."[25] The doctrine of creation is best understood as being first a doctrine about God the creator, of who he is in himself, before it is a doctrine about the creation itself[26] (whether by this we mean the *act* of creation or *what* he has created). It is necessary for Christian theology to avoid premature consideration of the creation to avoid affording it an autonomy and self-subsistent givenness that would set it alongside the Creator,[27] who then descends in our deficient understanding to a mere cause alongside other causes. It is essential to remember that "[t]he doctrine [of creation] is chiefly concerned, not so much with causal explanation of what is as with contemplation of the fact that what is might not have been and yet is, and of the infinite bliss of God who lies

[25] John Webster, "Trinity and Creation," in *God Without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology, Vol. 1* (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 83.
[26] "What Christian theology says about creation is a function of what it says about God, and what it says about God is a function of what it hears from God." Webster, "Trinity and Creation," 84.
[27] Webster warns of the danger that "…the existence and history of created things may be assumed as a given, quasi-necessary, reality, rather than a wholly surprising effect of divine goodness, astonishment at which pervades all Christian teaching." John Webster, "*Non Ex Aequo*: God's Relation to Creatures," in *God Without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology, Vol. 1* (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 118.

on the other side of that 'might not have been.'"[28] But even to move directly to this aspect of creaturely being – that it is in itself nothing – is not the first task: "Theological thought about creation begins with contemplation of God's immanent being and only then moves to reflect upon God's transitive acts. '[I]n the teaching of faith, which considers creatures only in their relation to God, the consideration of God comes first, that of creatures afterwards.'"[29]

This way of proclaiming the priority of the doctrine of God insists that it is not only the foundation for a doctrine of creation and then, subsequently, of our understanding of providence and reconciliation, but that theology never really moves past it – that speaking of things in relation to God never stops being a way of speaking of God himself. It might seem that such an approach would represent a devaluation of the creation, but the opposite is the case: it is when we treat the creation in isolation from the identity of the Creator that we devalue it, because we then lose sight of its precious character as a gift given, sustained, and reconciled to one in whom is such fullness that he has no need of it and can therefore truly give, sustain, and reconcile creaturely being out of a love free from envy or lack.[30] And so the benefit of not separating the doctrine of creation from

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[28] Webster, "Trinity and Creation," 84.

[29] Webster, "*Non Ex Aequo*," 119, citing St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* ed. Joseph Kenny, O.P., available at http://dhspriory.org/thomas/ContraGentiles.htm, accessed January 29, 2016 (hereafter SCG) II.4.5. Kathryn Tanner's linguistic approach, developing "non-contrastive" rules of grammar for speaking of God and creation and of the relationship between the efficacy of divine and human action exhibits a similar ordering. Her rules for speaking of God's agency require that it be described as universal and immediate, which, she notes, implies that creatures must be described as universally and immediately dependent on God – so the rule for talk about God's action is given priority and becomes the basis for talk about the action of creatures. Here again she suggests a direct connection between metaphysics and theology: "Factors that affect a theologian's emphasis in the use of these rules include, we shall see, a theologian's metaphysical commitments, methodology and particular theological priorities." Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 84.

[30] "Christian teaching about creation is ordered by confession and acclamation of God's matchless self-sufficiency." Webster, "*Non Ex Aequo*," 119.

the doctrine of the Creator,[31] nor God's works of reconciliation and providence from the act of creation, is that we learn to speak of the love God has for his creatures when we are taught to speak of him as love in himself.[32]

Webster provides yet further reason for us to expect that a well-ordered doctrine of creation would be necessary to the cogency of the rest of our theology when he speaks of creation as a "distributed" doctrine, e.g. one which cannot be left behind but only find "amplification and application" as we move to other doctrinal topics.

> The first (both in sequence and in material primacy) distributed doctrine is the doctrine of the Trinity… The doctrine of creation is the second distributed doctrine, although because its scope is restricted to the *opera Dei ad extra*, its distribution is less comprehensive than that of the doctrine of Trinity. Within this limit, the doctrine of creation is ubiquitous. It is not restricted to one particular point in the sequence of Christian doctrine, but provides orientation and a measure of governance to all that theology has to say about all things in relation to God.[33]

For Webster, creation "is the bridge by which consideration of God *in se* passes over to consideration of God *ad extra*…"[34] – in other words, in contemplation of creation we proceed from the divine processions to the divine missions.[35] Again, to move from processions to missions does not mean leaving the processions

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[31] "…the Christian doctrine of creation makes little sense except against the background of a well-ordered understanding of the distinction between uncreated and created being." Webster, "Trinity and Creation," 83.

[32] "…it is only after laying the groundwork of a theology of the essence, persons and immanent activities of the godhead that we can proceed in an assured way to treat the *opera exeuntia*, for God does not first become active in relation to creatures; and it is precisely the antecedent and eternally rich activity of God's inner being which secures the blessing of creation ." Webster, "Trinity and Creation," 92.

[33] Webster, "*Non Ex Aequo*", 117.

[34] Webster, "*Non Ex Aequo*", 117.

[35] Webster's article "Trinity and Creation" ends with a rich consideration of the particular ways in which the work of creation may be referred to each of the three persons of the Trinity, without dividing one from the other in any part of this archetypal external work (thus respecting the principle that the *Opera trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*). Webster, "Trinity and Creation," 95-98.

behind: it is in this sense that the doctrine of the Trinity is the first distributed doctrine, such that "the first body of material (the divine processions) [constitutes] the founding principles of the second (the divine missions). The second body of material on God's outer works," Webster continues, "may then itself be divided into consideration of the work of nature (creation and providence) and the work of grace (election, reconciliation and the consummation of all things)."[36]

Finally, Webster recommends a particular ordering within this last division, such that we proceed from the *opus naturae* to the *opus gratiae*, e.g. from creation to reconciliation. Once again, we do not leave the doctrine of creation behind when we turn to the doctrines of grace. "Teaching about creation 'opens the logical and theological space for other Christian beliefs and mysteries,'[37] because contemplation of that teaching enables discernment of essential properties of the relation between God and created things which will be further displayed when considering the history of their interaction as it unfolds in the economy."[38] This "further display" refers to real developments in our understanding, such that the end result is not only that we develop an understanding of reconciliation, providence, justification, etc., that speaks properly of who God is and what creation is in relation to him, but also amplifies our understanding of God and his work of creation.[39] The order of procession recommended here

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[36] Webster, "*Non Ex Aequo*: God's Relation to Creatures," 117.
[37] Robert Solokowski, "Creation and Christian Understanding," in David Burrell and B. McGinn, eds., *God and Creation*, 179.
[38] Webster, "*Non Ex Aequo,*" 118.
[39] To be sure, it is not the case that creation amplifies God or that reconciliation changes the actual character of creation; the developments referred to here pertain to our finite and mutable

> does not entail that all other doctrines are to be derived from the doctrine of creation, or that those other doctrines do not also in their turn illuminate teaching about creation. Consideration of the *opus gratiae* enriches and extends what is said about the *opus naturae*, most of all by enabling closer identification of the archetype and agent of creation ('in him all things were created') and of its telos ('all things were created through him and for him,' Col. 1.16). At the same time, teaching about God the creator and his work exercises considerable sway in articulating the work of grace, whose intelligibility depends in some measure upon principles about the coming-to-be and the nature of created things in relation to God which are laid down in a theology of creation.[40]

This brief interaction with Webster underscores the rationale for the approach taken in this dissertation. For the most part, our concern here will be internal to the second division that Webster describes - how God's external work of creation forms the foundation for an understanding of his external works of grace[41] - and we will be tracing the impact of the former on the latter (while also noting places where, as Webster suggests, teaching on justification and providence deepens our understanding of the gift of creation). In focusing most of our attention on the external works of God, we will not be leaving behind the doctrine of God in himself and his works *ad intra* (indeed, it seems that an implication of Webster's arguments is that the doctrine of God simply cannot be left behind, and that attempts to do so only issue in deformities in our understanding both of God's processions and his missions). On the contrary, the reason that Thomas Aquinas' doctrine of creation is proposed here as sufficiently metaphysically robust to found reformed concerns for soteriology and providence is that his doctrine of creation is explicitly built on his doctrine of God: the participatory

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comprehension of the infinite and immutable God and the steadfast love in which he made and sustains creation as 'very good.'

[40] Webster, "*Non Ex Aequo,*" 118.

[41] A minor change in the scheme we will pursue here, relative to Webster, is that we will also divide God's external works of nature, and consider how the doctrine of creation also shapes the doctrine of providence.

ontology he presents is a direct outworking, perhaps even a restatement, of his understanding of divine simplicity (as it relates to creatures) and the real distinction between Creator and creatures.

Talk of the real distinction over against a metaphysics of univocity of being often issues in a story in which Thomas Aquinas is pitted against John Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, Gabriel Biel, and sundry other theological villains who ushered in modernity and secularism via the Trojan Horse of misguided Christian theology.[42] In this dissertation the participatory metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas unquestionably provide the backdrop of what is most fruitful for orthodox Christian theology: if it is true that a "Christian doctrine of God needs to respect 'the Christian distinction,' that is, the difference between God and creatures which is beyond both reciprocity and dialectic,"[43] then it certainly the position taken here that the real distinction as understood by Thomas (and its subsequent fleshing out in Erich Przywara's understanding of the analogy of being) delivers what is necessary. And if it is further understood that all Christian theology depends for its coherence on a proper doctrine of God, then it is of course clear why we will argue that Thomas' understanding of God and all things in relation to God is the best foundation for the whole of Christian theology. We will be

[42] This story is well-known to readers of the movement known as Radical Orthodoxy, but has been told elsewhere as well. See, among other sources, John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd Edition (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing,, 2006); John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997); John Milbank, *Being Reconciled* (London: Routledge, 2003); John Milbank, *Beyond Secular Reason* (Chichester, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2013); Catherine Pickstock, "Duns Scotus: His Historical and Contemporary Significance," *Modern Theology* 21:4 (October 2005), 543-574; Adrian Pabst, *Metaphysics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012), especially chapter 6; Aaron Riches, *Ecce Homo: The Divine Unity of Christ* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2016, 209-216 ; Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2007); Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2012).
[43] Webster, "Trinity and Creation," 90.

tracing the connection between a rejection of Thomistic concepts and various theological difficulties found in reformed figures – but who are the villains here? On that question, this dissertation takes no fixed position, not being primarily a work of history, but only of historical theology. However, a brief interaction with the fine work investigating this history that can be found, arguing both for different entry points for modernity[44] and, indeed, for the benefits of doctrines such as univocity of being and voluntarism, is in order. Although our primary concern in this thesis is not exactly who devised the metaphysical schemes that, we will argue, introduced unnecessary aporia into the thought of the reformed figures considered in the following pages, or when they did so, we should make clear why we insist that the adoption and promotion of the doctrine of univocity of being is inherently problematic, and not merely an antecedent to later troubles in reformed theology.

Richard Cross,[45] Thomas Williams,[46] and Daniel Horan[47] have all recently written in defense of Scotus and specifically of univocity. All three have been highly critical of the "Scotus Story," as Horan terms it,[48] promulgated by members of the theological movement known as Radical Orthodoxy such as John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, which focuses criticism on John Duns Scotus for

[44] See, for example, Richard Cross, *The Medieval Christian Philosophers: An Introduction* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co., Ltd., 2014); and Heiko Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2000).
[45] Richard Cross, "'Where Angels Fear to Tread': Duns Scotus and Radical Orthodoxy," *Antonianum* 76 (2001): 7-41; and Richard Cross, "Scotus and Suárez at the Origins of Modernity," in Wayne Hankey and Douglas Hedley, eds., *Deconstructing Radical Orthodoxy: Postmodern Theology, Rhetoric, and Truth* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005), 65-80.
[46] Thomas Williams, "The Doctrine of Univocity is True and Salutary," *Modern Theology* 21:4 (October 2005): 575-585; and Thomas Williams, "Radical Orthodoxy, Univocity and the New Apophaticism," unpublished paper presented at the International Congress for Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, Michigan (2006).
[47] Daniel P. Horan, O.F.M., *Postmodernity and Univocity: A Critical Account of Radical Orthodoxy and John Duns Scotus* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2014).
[48] Horan, *Postmodernity and Univocity,* 3.

introducing the doctrine of the univocity of being and tracing all manner of modern ills back to this development in medieval theology. That critique in particular will not occupy us here, as our interest is in what Cross, Williams, and Horan have to say in support of Scotus and univocity, and why we do not find it compelling, not in defending Milbank, Pickstock, or the "Scotus Story" *per se*.[49]

Cross succinctly summarizes Scotus' teaching on univocity as follows: "For Scotus, there is a sense of *ens* – and other key concepts – which is univocal to God and creatures; for Aquinas there is not."[50] Central to the argument of Cross, Williams, and Horan is the assertion that Scotus means this only in a semantic, and not in an ontological sense. Whereas, Horan argues, Thomas would say that "God and creatures both come under the extension of the concept of *being* in terms of the *res significate*, but the concept of *being* belongs properly to God and derivatively (i.e., *per participationem*) to creatures… [f]or Scotus… the concept of *being* applies properly to *neither* God nor creatures…"[51] *Being*, on this account, refers to no ontological property of God or creatures, but only to a semantic concept, a "vicious abstraction," as Cross puts it.[52] Univocity of being, on this account, makes no ontological statement about God or creatures whatsoever; extending the concept of *being* to both is merely a "manner of speaking" – "a purely logical exercise, one that deals primarily with concepts in terms of a

[49] Horan, it should be noted, also goes further in providing a constructive defense of Scotus, paying close attention to the subtle doctor's more immediate context, including interlocutors who came after Thomas such as Henry of Ghent. Horan, *Postmodernity and Univocity*, 157-188.
[50] Cross, "Where Angels Fear to Tread," 12; cf. ST Ia.13.5 and John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* 1.3.1.1 , found in *Opera Omnia: Studio et Cura Commisionis Scotisticae ad fidem codicum edita*, edited by Carlo Balíc et al., 21 vols. (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1950-, cited by Horan, *Postmodernity and Univocity,* 108.
[51] Horan, *Postmodernity and Univocity,* 109.
[52] Cross, "Where Angels Fear to Tread," 13 and Cross, "Scotus and Suárez at the Origins of Modernity," 66-67.

semantic argument arising from epistemological concerns,"[53] as Horan puts it. A comparison of "Aquinas' analogical predication of being" as a property, and one properly applied to God only, and "Duns Scotus' univocal predication of being is, in some sense, 'comparing apples and oranges.'"[54]

Scotus, according to Cross, isn't attempting to say anything positive about God or creatures in using the term *being* univocally in reference to both: "All it tells us is that there is a concept under whose extension both God and creatures fall. … When we claim that things 'are' in the same way, we are saying no more than they fall under the same vicious abstraction."[55] Nor is he in any way dissolving the distinction between God and creatures; univocity in no way "entails that there is an unmodified 'common essence of being' being between God and creatures. It means that there is a sense in which God and creatures fall under the extension of one and the same concept – though even then in radically different ways."[56] Nor does it entail that creatures have any autonomous ground of being in themselves: "Both being and the possibility of being are radically dependent on God in Scotus' understanding of the creative act." [57]And it is vehemently denied

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[53] Horan, *Postmodernity and Univocity,* 173. Horan cites Scotus' definition of univocity from the *Ordinatio*: "And lest there be any contention about the word 'univocation,' I call that concept univocal that has sufficient unity in itself that to affirm and deny it of the same subject suffices as a contradiction. It also suffices as a syllogistic middle term, so that where two terms are united in a middle term that is one in this fashion, they are inferred without a fallacy of equivocation to be united among themselves." *Ordinatio* 1.3.1.1-2, cited by Horan, *Postmodernity and Univocity*, 172; the key for Horan and Cross is that Scotus treats univocity as a "syllogistic middle term," not an ontological property. See also Cyril Shircel, *The Univocity of the Concept of Being in the Philosophy of John Duns Scotus* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1942), 28-29.

[54] Horan, *Postmodernity and Univocity,* 111.

[55] Cross, "Where Angels Fear to Tread," 15; see also Cross, "Scotus and Suárez at the Origins of Modernity," 69-80, and Williams 577.

[56] Cross, "Where Angels Fear to Tread," 22. Allan Wolter explains, "When the term [being] designates everything according to the proper *ratio* of each it is predicated analogously or equivocally. Yet it is possible to prescind from all differentiation and to signify by the term merely a common aspect, in which case both the term and the concept are predicated univocally." Allan Wolter, *The Transcendentals and Their Function in the Metaphysics of Duns Scotus* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1946), 55-56.

[57] Cross, "Where Angels Fear to Tread," 36.

that univocity would in any sense make God subordinate to or dependent on some higher substrate:

> For claiming that God falls under the extension of a concept – *being* – is very different from claiming that God somehow requires Being for his existence, as it were. In general, claiming that something falls under the extension of a concept does not entail that the reality of the concept is in any sense necessary for the existence of the thing that falls under it. That there is a concept *being* may well be necessary for the truth of the *statement* 'God is.'[58]

That final comment made by Cross indicates why he, along with Williams and Horan, see the doctrine of univocity as not only defensible, but beneficial: because without it, talk of God's being, and talk of God in general, falls into unintelligibility. Williams defines univocity as follows: "Notwithstanding the irreducible ontological diversity between God and creatures, there are concepts under whose extension both God and creatures fall, so that the corresponding predicate expressions are used with exactly the same sense in predications about God as in predications about creatures."[59] His argument is that "univocity must be true in order to have an intelligible theological language,"[60] because equivocity and analogy both abandon human capacity to speak of God at all. Analogy, he argues, must have recourse to *some* univocal predicate in order to avoid infinite regress or sheer emptiness: "it is only if we can say to some extent what God is that we have any basis for saying that our language about God fails to express what he is."[61] Williams, thus, finds unhelpful the recourse to negative language about God if it *never* finds some resting place in making some sort of positive

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[58] Cross, "Scotus and Suárez at the Origins of Modernity," 72.
[59] Williams, "The Doctrine of Univocity is True and Salutary," 578.
[60] Horan, *Postmodernity and Univocity,* 124.
[61] Williams, "Radical Orthodoxy, Univocity and the New Apophaticism," 3; cf. Horan, *Postmodernity and Univocity*, 171-174.

assertion. As Horan puts it, "[w]ithout univocity, one is not left with a choice between analogy and equivocal language, but rather one is left with nothing."[62]

Why, then, do we find these arguments uncompelling and maintain that univocity of being is problematic. Briefly, there are two reasons.

Take first Williams' argument that analogy is no better than equivocity for the intelligibility of theological language. This rests on a crude understanding of Thomas' explanation of analogy, which is more than merely to say that something is true of two entities in "different, but related, senses."[63] Thomas specifically addresses Williams' concerns that analogy leads to infinite regress[64] or emptiness,[65] and is clear on the exact sense in which names predicated of God and creatures are analogous only. First, in the sense that whatever is predicated of creatures is predicated as distinct from all other predicates: "all perfections existing in creatures divided and multiplied, pre-exist in God unitedly,"[66] because God is simple. And second, "whatever is said of God and creatures, is said according to the relation of a creature to God as its principle and cause."[67] Analogical predication, in other words, does not vitiate our ability to speak of God using concepts that apply to creatures; rather, it calls attention to the relation of creatures to the Creator, in which the former relate *per participationem* to God, "wherein all perfections of things pre-exist excellently."[68] Rather than

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[62] Horan, *Postmodernity and Univocity*, 169.
[63] Horan, *Postmodernity and Univocity,* 124, summarizing Williams, "The Doctrine of Univocity is True and Salutary," 577-578.
[64] ST Ia.13.5.*resp.*1.
[65] ST Ia.13.5.*resp.*2.
[66] ST Ia.13.5.
[67] ST Ia.13.5.
[68] ST Ia.13.5.

landing on mere univocity or dissipating into unintelligibility, then, analogy exhibits the rhythm that Erich Przywara saw expressed in the statement of the Fourth Lateran Council, that "One cannot note any similarity between creator and creature, however great, without being compelled to observe an ever greater dissimilarity between them."[69]

Second, consider Cross' insistence that Scotus' use of univocity is nothing but a "manner of speaking," the "extension of a concept" to God and creatures that carries no ontological freight. If this is taken literally, it seems to deliver no more theological intelligibility than analogical predication – indeed, it seems to duck the question entirely, delivering nothing more than talk, nothing more than mere abstraction without any content whatsoever. We may be able to say truly that "God is," but we have no idea whatsoever what that actually means. If this is not taken literally, on the other hand – if univocal predication of the being of God and his creatures tells us anything about what is actually the case - then the argument that univocity does violence to the distinction between God and creatures, and particularly to the doctrine of divine simplicity, stands. Cross and Horan both argue that Scotus does not believe that *being* is a genus to which God and creatures both belong as species.[70] But to say that the concept of being extends to both God and creatures – if that statement tells us anything about what is actually true of God and creatures – is precisely what it means to make being a genus, to which the two belong. If this is the case, then, the objections of

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[69] See John R. Betz, translator's introduction to Erich Przywara, *Analogia Entis (Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm),* trans. John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014), 72-73. Przywara and Lateran IV will be discussed further in Chapter 4 on Karl Barth, below.
[70] Cross, "Where Angels Fear to Tread," 15 and Horan, *Postmodernity and Univocity,* 111n35, 182-183.

Cross and Horan notwithstanding, we are speaking of being as a property that applies to both God and creatures univocally. And this, in turn, rejects simplicity, because it means that whatever distinguishes God from creatures, God must be *composed* of that quality and the being which properly applies to him in the same way that it applies to creatures, so that both can be included in its extension.

We will, then, insist that the rejection of divine simplicity inherent in univocity of being, and the concomitant tendency toward viewing God as an extrinsic causal force, affecting his creatures alongside other forces in the universe, is inimical to orthodox Christian theology. This includes reformed theology, and in particular central reformed doctrines such as justification by faith and the sovereign providence of God. This thesis will argue that these doctrines depend for their integrity on a doctrine of creation that respects the real distinction. Again, we will go beyond arguing merely that the participatory metaphysic of Thomas Aquinas is not inimical to reformed theology, suggesting that it is in fact its most natural home. We will seek to argue that the logic of *creatio ex nihilo* that flows out of Thomas' real distinction and Przywara's analogy of being (which, I will contend, are effectively restatements of the same doctrine) is also the logic of the reformed understanding of justification and of how providence relates divine to creaturely action. Likewise, we will see in our examination of Calvin, Owen, Edwards and Barth how reformed theology has gone awry precisely when and because this metaphysical framework has been rejected. This is not to say that better metaphysics guarantees better theology, but it is an encouragement toward a deeper sort of ecumenical reflection among Christian theologians that goes beyond finding least common denominator areas of agreement, working the

"distributed" doctrines of trinity and creation out into the full range of Christian contemplation.

The remaining chapters of this dissertation are as follows. In the first chapter, we introduce many of the basic concepts with which we have to deal: the doctrine of creation as found in Thomas Aquinas, and the doctrines of justification by faith and the providence of God as expressed in standard accounts of reformed theology such as the Westminster Confession of Faith and Heinrich Heppe's *Reformed Dogmatics*,[71] and argue for an organic connection between the two. We then look at two of the early reformers, considering Calvin's *Bondage and Liberation of the Will* and the thoroughgoing Thomism of John Owen. We argue that an affinity for Thomist concepts in the doctrine of God and creation allow both to uphold the integrity of the creature in justification and providence, even as both prescind from Thomist ideas specific to justification itself. Our next chapter turns to Jonathan Edwards, who extensively described his metaphysical presuppositions and devoted a major treatise to God's work of creation. In this chapter we will argue that because Edwards implicitly adopts a univocal understanding of being and an extrinsic account of causality, his defense of the sovereignty of God leads him to espouse a panentheistic and occasionalist depiction of creation, in which creatures fail to be truly distinct from God, serving as mere occasions for the exercise of his power. Finally, we will turn to Karl Barth, arguing that similar problems to those found in Edwards – in particular, a view of primary and secondary causation that places the former alongside and extrinsic to the latter – leads him to a position of *Alleinwirksamkeit*,

[71] Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics: Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources,* trans. G.T. Thomson (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1950).

in which God not only causes all but is the sole agent of causation in the world, denying God's power to give rise to an order of causation truly distinct from himself. A final chapter briefly sums up and concludes the argument.

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Chapter 1: We Are God's Workmanship: Creation, Justification, and Providence

Constitutive Word

During the Reformation the reformers claimed to be engaged in a project of *ressourcement*, reclaiming the doctrines of grace championed by the fathers of the church and neglected in their day. They also charged the church to be perpetually attentive to the address of scripture, ever reforming, *semper reformanda*. The burden of this thesis is to argue that the doctrine that needs reclaiming by reformed theology today is the doctrine of creation from nothing, not as a diversion from doctrines of grace such as justification by faith and divine providence, but precisely for their defense and nourishment.

My aim in this introductory chapter is to show, first, that the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* and the doctrine of justification by faith alone both follow a similar logic that I will refer to as *constitutive word* – they make real what they declare. The argument is not quite so strong as to say that there is an isomorphism relating the two doctrines – not, that is, that there exists some sort of one-to-one correspondence between the doctrine of creation from nothing and a reformed soteriology of justification. Rather, I argue that the former implies, and the latter presumes, the same ontology, one which I will claim is best embodied in the participatory metaphysic of Thomas Aquinas. In other words, a reformed doctrine of justification is not simply a repetition of creation in the realm of soteriology, but it does depend for its coherence on a properly worked-out metaphysic of creation. Exploring the aporia that develop within reformed

theology in the absence of this metaphysic will take up the major part of this dissertation as we examine aspects of the theology of Jonathan Edwards and Karl Barth.

Second, I will discuss the doctrine of providence – a doctrine which, in a narrow sense, is similar for Thomas and for reformed theology, but which, in some of the reformers, opens out onto implications that differ greatly from a Thomistic view, and which contain certain problems. The next chapter of this dissertation will explore this in depth via a consideration of John Calvin's *Bondage and Liberation of the Will* and the theology of John Owen. Calvin and Owen manage to avoid problems that will be a continuing theme of later chapters of this dissertation – namely, a tendency to evacuate creaturely reality, leaving God as sole agent (*Alleinwirksamkeit*) or rendering creation an extension of God (panentheism). I will suggest that, again, this is because the doctrine of providence fits best within a participatory metaphysic: when providence is not framed within a robust doctrine of creation, one which is itself an outworking of a robust doctrine of God that properly characterizes the real distinction between God and creatures, providence ends up meaning that creaturely agency and freedom are displaced, whereas the freedom of the creature is grounded in God's fatherly care when the radical transcendence of God the Creator vis-à-vis his creatures is properly articulated.

A final brief reminder is in order: the reason that a participatory metaphysic is key to a proper understanding of creation, justification, and providence is not

that good philosophy is inherently necessary to good theology.[72] Indeed, I would argue that a participatory metaphysic is not simply good philosophy at all, but that it *is* good theology. A participatory metaphysic follows directly from a properly worked-out doctrine of *God* – the God who is not only one, simple, infinite, eternal, and unchanging, but who is triune and who has revealed himself in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Demonstrating that this is the case will be a key aim of this dissertation.

Justification by Faith: the Key Aspects

The first focus of this chapter is on a single tenet of reformed theology, justification by grace through faith. The way the argument is going to proceed is largely by *definition* – we will define reformed justification, then creation from nothing, then a participatory ontology, and then we will try to draw some analogies across them to show how the three constitute a coherent whole, with

[72] "Recent reflection on the theology of creation has been much occupied with countering metaphysical error by genealogy and by the elaboration of a better philosophy of being and causation. It may readily be granted that some 'modern' deformities of Christian teaching about creation derive in part from metaphysical disorder which is made more acute when theology shies away from handling speculative topics. But overinvestment in combating malign philosophy is not wise. If Christian teaching about creation is to be set on a firmer footing and to be given and intellectually and spiritually cogent exposition, we do well to direct our expectations rather to biblical exegesis and dogmatics, the double preoccupation of well-ordered theology." John Webster, "Creation out of Nothing", in Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, eds., *Christian Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2016), 126-127. Webster notes, in relation to his reference to "modern," that whether it "refers to post-Scotus or post-Kant is a matter of debate." More succinctly, he has pointed out elsewhere that deformities in theology are not due primarily to metaphysical disorder, but the fact that our minds are in rebellion: our main problem is not bad philosophy, but sin. "[W]hat restricts us is not simply the finiteness of created intelligence but its fallenness and 'futility' (Rom. 1.21), its darkening of counsel by words without wisdom (Job 38.2). Knowledge of the creator and of ourselves as creatures is a casualty of the fall… To know its creator, reason must be healed by repentance and the suffering of divine instruction, by which love of God is made to grow." John Webster, "Trinity and Creation," in *God Without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology, Vol. 1* (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 84. Likewise Tanner: "An audience is likely to interpret a theological remark to conform to its interests. Sinful interests lead to illicit inferences." Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1988), 116.

that coherence depending primarily on having a proper metaphysic of creation.[73] Focusing on justification by faith is a way of narrowing down to what is essential and central, recognizing that to trace the importance of a proper doctrine of creation throughout the whole of reformed theology would far exceed the scope of any single work. Kevin Vanhoozer has written recently that "the material principle of the Reformation is justification by grace alone through faith alone."[74] Vanhoozer is only the most recent reformed theologian to make such a judgment. In *Principle of Protestantism*, Philip Schaff called justification by faith the "material principle" of the Reformation and the sum of the gospel.[75] Brian Gerrish lists justification by faith among the three main points of reformation theology (along with biblical authority and the priesthood of all believers).[76] And in his *Reformed Dogmatics*, Herman Heppe claimed that the evangelical doctrine of salvation stands or falls with justification,[77] words which echo the famous quote attributed to Luther that justification is "the article by which the church stands or falls."[78]

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[73] This follows from the fact that, as John Webster puts it, "Christian teaching about the creation of the world out of nothing is… a distributed doctrine, cropping up throughout theology's treatment of the economy with varying degrees of explicitness," alongside the other cardinal distributed doctrine of Christian theology, which is that of the trinity itself. John Webster, "'Love is Also a Lover of Life': *Creatio Ex Nihilo* and Creaturely Goodness," in *God Without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology, Vol. 1* (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 99.
[74] Kevin Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2016), 16.
[75] Philip Schaff, trans. John W. Nevin, *Principle of Protestantism* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 80.
[76] Brian Gerrish, "Priesthood and Ministry in the Theology of Luther," *Church History* 34, no. 4 (1965), 404.
[77] Herman Heppe, trans. G.T. Thomson, *Reformed Dogmatics: Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1950), 543.
[78] The quote comes from Johann Heinrich Alsted's *Theologia scholastic didacta* (Hanover, 1618). Luther's own words were similar: *quia isto articulo state stat Ecclesia, reuente ruit Ecclesia*, "Because if this article [of justification] stands, the church stands; if this article collapses, the church collapses." (WA 40/3:352.3)

Why, then, has justification by faith alone proved so central to reformed theology? John Webster notes four key reasons:[79]

- It is primary in key biblical texts.
- It is inseparable from many other key reformed themes, including covenant, sin, law, the work of Christ, and the holiness of God and sanctification of His people.
- It lays particular emphasis on salvation as historical encounter
- It is well-suited to convey the anthropological entailments of the gratuity of God's work

Michael Allen, referring to these four points in his own book on justification, adds a fifth, that justification is also well-suited to convey the *theological* entailments of the gratuity of God's work.[80]

For the purposes of this essay, I am taking, as a "standard" definition of the reformed doctrine of justification by faith, that found in the eleventh chapter of the Westminster Confession of Faith. Two key points stand out as salient from that document: first, that justification is *forensic*, but second, that justification is *real*. In other words, it is legal, but not a legal fiction: justification is, in short, a

[79] John Webster, "*Rector et iudex super omnia genera doctrinarum?* The Place of the Doctrine of Justification," in *What is Justification About? Reformed Contributions to an Ecumenical Theme*, ed. Michael Weinrich and John P. Burgess (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009), 46-47, cited in Michael Allen, *Justification and the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2013), 13-14.
[80] Allen, *Justification and the Gospel*, 14.

constitutive word – a word that makes real what it declares, a creative speech-act that is its own material cause.

First, justification is *forensic*. "Those whom God effectually calls," Westminster says, "He also freely justifies; not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous…"[81]

Here is a clear distinctive of the reformed doctrine of justification: its forensic character. The righteousness by which we are justified is an alien righteousness, not in the sense that it is so extrinsic to the creature as to be unintelligible to its created nature, but rather in the sense that it is Christ's (after whose likeness human nature was created in the image of God[82]) and inseparable from Christ itself (such that we enjoy it by union with him) and it is *imputed*, not *transferred* from Christ nor *infused* into us. The Council of Trent understood accurately what it condemned when it denied that humans are justified "by the imputation of Christ's righteousness alone, or by the forgiveness of sins alone… or that the grace by which we are justified is merely the grace of God."[83]

The forensic nature of justification is one place where we can see that justification by faith and *creatio ex nihilo* are related by analogy, but do not perfectly correspond in every respect. Creaturely being is not imputed, but imparted, in God's act of creation. At the same time, both justification and

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[81] Westminster Confession of Faith, as adopted by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (Willow Grove, Pennsylvania: The Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2005), hereafter WCF, XI.1.
[82] Colossians 1:15, Hebrews 1:3.
[83] Council of Trent, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Vol. 2*, ed. Norman P. Tanner, S.J. (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2016), Canon 11.

creation find their source in God alone, such that we might say that neither creation nor the work of new creation that takes place in God's work of reconciliation[84] finds its material cause in its object. Though justification and creation differ in that imputation is involved only in the former, we can nevertheless say that the logic of justification depends and unfolds from the logic of *creatio ex nihilo*, so that Paul can remind his readers that faith rests its hope on the God "who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist."[85]

Second, justification is *real*, which is to say constitutive: while justification in reformed theology is a legal declaration, it is not a legal fiction. God does not pull the wool over his own eyes or discard his own holiness as judge, or the righteous demands of the law. Justification is, in a sense, based on *works* – but they are Christ's works. His satisfaction of the law represents the objective basis of the justification of sinners. The sentence previously quoted from the Westminster Confession of Faith binds the forensic nature and the objective basis of justification together as it continues:

> Those whom God effectually calls, He also freely justifies; not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on Him and His righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.[86]

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[84] 2 Corinthians 5:17.
[85] Romans 4:17, NRSV.
[86] WCF XI.1. Note that in saying that those who are justified "have not [faith] of themselves," it is saying that we cannot claim ourselves as the source of our own faith, not that we cannot say that we have faith in any sense. Here again is a similarity with creation: creation is *ex nihilo* and

The Confession goes on to say that "Christ, by His obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real and full satisfaction to His Father's justice in their behalf."[87] And it then provides the rationale: "in as much as He was given by the Father for them; and His obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead; and both, freely, not for any thing in them; their justification is only of free grace; that both the exact justice, and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners."[88]

Heppe's *Dogmatics* sums this up, saying that while the inward cause of justification is simply and solely the free grace of God, there must nonetheless be an outward motive, and that this must be some righteous work, some obedience to the law.[89] And so for Heppe, "Christ with his righteousness" is the material cause of justification. What this means is that we are not justified *contrary* to the law.[90] The difference between reformed and Tridentine justification is not essential, but circumstantial:[91] both agree that justification is based on obedience to the law, but for the reformed it is *Christ's* obedience to the law, applied to sinners by faith,[92] a view anathematized by Trent. Heppe immediately adds that what is imputed to sinners is not the *essential* righteousness of God: we are not united to

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the creature cannot claim any part in establishing its own being, but in fact receives existence as part of the gift of creation, but nevertheless can truly be said to have its existence. Creation is not nothing but is nothing in and of itself; likewise those who are justified have faith but "have not of themselves."

[87] WCF XI.3.

[88] WCF XI.3.

[89] Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 546.

[90] Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 547.

[91] Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 548.

[92] For Heppe, then, faith is not the condition of justification, which must always be obedience to the law; faith is only the instrument by which Christ's obedience to the law is apprehended by the justified sinner. So faith is not regarded as a *work* with intrinsic worth or merit; faith is only the means by which that which *has* worth is received. Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 553. Justification is never without inherent righteousness – in a sense it *is* by works – but by the work of *Christ*. Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 562-3.

Christ in his divinity.[93] And indeed, this *could not* satisfy the conditions of human justification. Christ satisfies the covenant of works as to his humanity, on behalf of humanity; otherwise humanity has no share in the eternal life merited by obedience to the law.

Creatio ex Nihilo

Below I will argue that the reformed doctrine of justification presumes an ontology,[94] one that must be rooted in the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, creation out of nothing; in this section I provide a careful definition of what that doctrine says, and what it does not say.

To begin with, consider what *ex nihilo* creation does *not* say. The doctrine does *not* say that creation represents any sort of motion or change of something from one state to another, whether in God or in creation. There is no change in God because the relationship between God and his creation is *real* – that is, structural - only on the side of the creature:[95] God's act of creation is constitutive of creaturely essence and existence (and, as we will see, of the fact that creaturely essence and existence are in union with one another), but creation is in no way constitutive of God. Creation does not change God; the being and glory of the creator are in no sense derived from the creature or from his act of creation. But likewise, creation represents no change in the creature, for when we say that creation is *out of nothing* we mean, precisely, that there is no pre-existing material

[93] Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 550.
[94] Kevin Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority After Babel*, 37.
[95] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, available at https://aquinas101.thomisticinstitute.org/st-index, accessed October 28, 2019 (hereafter ST), Ia.45.3.

of any kind that changes from an uncreated to a created state. Creation, we say, has no material cause: "To say *ex nihilo* is simply to say 'God alone.' For the coming-to-be of creatures, nothing is required but God. The act of creation effects 'the issuing of the whole of being from the universal cause,' and is undertaken in relation to nothing."[96] There is no before or after to God's act of creation, because time itself is created and the act is not temporally extended. "Nor," writes Webster, making explicit the link between the doctrine of God in his immanent perfection and the doctrine of creation, "is the act of creation an act *against* anything, the assertion of mastery over contending forces. It is not a 'dramatic enactment… the absolute power of God realizing itself in achievement and relationship,' because 'absolute' excludes self-realization, achievement and constitutive relationship."[97] Creation is out of *nothing*; there is no receiving subject of God's act that is presupposed by that act, but the receiving subject is itself constituted by the act of creation, part of the gift that it receives.[98]

Neither does the doctrine of creation out of nothing posit that in the beginning there was one thing, and then there were two: God, and, alongside of God, creation. And yet the doctrine does draw the sharpest distinction between God and creation: in the act of creation, God gives being to that which is not God. Thus *creatio ex nihilo* rejects both pantheism and panentheism, both of which imply that God is all there is, such that creation *is* nothing rather than being *out of*

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[96] John Webster, "*Non Ex Aequo*: God's Relation to Creatures," in *God Without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology, Vol. 1* (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 120, citing Aquinas, ST Ia.45.1 resp.
[97] Webster, "*Non Ex Aequo*," 121, citing Jon Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), xvi. Compare this to Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/1, trans. J.W. Edwards, O. Bussey, H. Knight (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), hereafter CD III/1, 102-110.
[98] ST Ia.44.1.

nothing. God is not the heavens and the earth; they are not part of God or contained in God, nor he in them.[99]

A key characteristic of patristic theology is an emphasis on careful explication of the doctrine of creation, as a ground for all subsequent teaching about God's relation to all that he has made.[100] Ian McFarland has done an admirable job of summarizing concisely the rise of the doctrine in the early church fathers, and situating it against its cultural and theological background. The biblical witness to the doctrine is not as simple as we would like it to be: while passages such as Romans 4:17 ("who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist,") and Hebrews 11:3 ("By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear,") appear to provide support for the doctrine, much hangs on exactly what would have been understood by the phrases "things that do not exist" and "which do not appear." As McFarland writes, "external evidence suggests that it is a Greek idiom used for the coming into being of anything new (e.g., children from their parents), without any implication for whether or not this new thing is derived from any preexisting substance."[101] Justin Martyr affirmed the teaching of Plato's *Timaeus* that God had formed the universe out of pre-existing matter, arguing that it was consistent with the Genesis account of God

[99] "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built!" – 1 Kings 8:27, NRSV.
[100] J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London and New York: A&C Black, 1977), 83-87.
[101] Ian McFarland, *From Nothing: A Theology of Creation*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 5, citing evidence drawn together by Gerhard May in *Creatio ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of "Creation out of Nothing" in Early Christian Thought* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 8, including Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.2-3; Plato, *Symposium* 205B; and Philo, *De specialis legibus* 2.2.225, 229.

forming and filling a world that was initially "formless and void," and even arguing that Plato had taken his account from Moses.[102]

McFarland observes that the scriptural basis for the patristic tradition centered as much on John 1 as on Genesis 1, Romans 4, or Hebrews 11. John, with his "utterly unambiguous" assertion that in the beginning there was only God and, with God, the Word who is God, provides the clearest grounds for concluding that creation did not bring potency into act from the ground of pre-existing material – no "formless waste, water, or swirling deep alongside God"[103] – but that, on the contrary, "the sole precondition and only context for creation is God."[104] And at the same time, it "signals that creation from nothing is not merely a claim about God's relation to the world, but also a statement about God's own identity,"[105] both because it posits the most radical possible sort of transcendence of the creator (that he is not a being alongside beings or a power alongside powers, shaping some pre-existing matter to his will and yet being inevitably constrained to work only with what potential he finds there) *and* because it introduces the Christologically determined claim that "although God is the sole presupposition of creation, the God who creates is not solitary, since the Word who *is* God is also *with* God."[106] And with this, the doctrine of creation takes on a case angled toward a God who is not only almighty creator and uncaused cause, but who is indefatigable redeemer and love in himself.

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[102] Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 84-85; McFarland, *From Nothing*, 2ns2, 5
[103] McFarland, *From Nothing*, 22.
[104] McFarland, *From Nothing*, 23.
[105] McFarland, *From Nothing*, 23.
[106] McFarland, *From Nothing*, 23.

It was against this backdrop, involving metaphysics and soteriology in the same inquiry, that the earliest Christian teaching about the creation of the world out of nothing developed. McFarland points to a text written by Theophilus of Antioch, ca. 180, as the earliest direct reference by a Christian to the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*: "God brought everything into being out of what does not exist, so that his greatness might be known and understood through his works."[107]

Theophilus' direct target was likely a theologian named Hermogenes; we know from Eusebius that Theophilus composed a treatise, now lost, against him, as did Tertullian, in the first known defense of *creatio ex nihilo* written in Latin.[108] The argumentation in these works is theological as much as it is exegetical: the doctrine of creation out of nothing developed as a theological balancing act, simultaneously affirming God's direct involvement in the material world against Gnosticism, and God's transcendence and sovereignty over his creation.[109] Theophilus writes that God is "without beginning because uncreated," "immutable because immortal," "Lord because He is Lord over all things," "Father because He is prior to all things," " most high because He is above all things," "almighty because he holds all things; for the heights of the heavens, the depths of the abysses and the ends of the world are in His hands"[110] – and so, McFarland argues, he defends *creatio ex nihilo* as the only account that does justice

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[107] McFarland, *From Nothing*, 1; the text is *To Autolycus* 1.4, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (hereafter ANF), ed. Alesander Roberts and James Donaldson, 10 vols. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994-), vol. 2.
[108] McFarland, *From Nothing*, 8-9; Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 4.24, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (hereafter NPNF), ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, 14 vols. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994-1999); 1:202.
[109] See the discussion in the introduction of Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 36-57; cf. also Rowan Williams, *Christ: The Heart of Creation* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2018), 69.
[110] *To Autolycus* 1.5, quoted by Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 85.

to the Christian conviction that there is but one uncreated, unbegotten, unchanging, God:[111]

> If God is to be confessed as Lord without qualification, then everything that is not God must depend on God for its existence without qualification. Otherwise, whatever realities existed independently of God would constitute a limit on God's ability to realize God's will in creation, in the same way that the properties of wood constrain the creative possibilities open to the carpenter. Because Theophilus refused to acknowledge any such limits, he concluded that creation cannot be thought of as God reshaping some preexisting material… Instead, God brings into being the very stuff of which the universe is made. In short, God creates *from nothing*.[112]

Creatio ex nihilo, then, developed as an implication of core commitments of the Jewish and Christian doctrine of God:[113] that God is the creator, that God is one, that God is transcendent and sovereign – in short, that it can be affirmed without qualification that "that power belongs to God and steadfast love belongs to [the Lord]."[114] *Creatio ex nihilo* presupposes God's simplicity and his aseity; it presupposes that he is the primary cause, cause of all causes, himself radically uncaused, unmoved, and unconstrained by any factor outside of himself, because all such factors only have their being in Him. He is cause of all things by his will and not by necessity, but at the same time he does not act arbitrarily or capriciously in creating but in accordance with his goodness – that is, his fully realized nature as pure act.[115] "In creating, therefore, God is not bringing his

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111 McFarland, *From Nothing*, 9; Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 85.
112 McFarland, *From Nothing*, 2.
113 And indeed, John Webster would insist that the doctrine of God is and must be prior: "The primary subject matter of theological treatment of creation out of nothing is God himself; it inquires first, not into the world's beginning but into 'who gave it this beginning, and who was the creator.'" Webster, "'Love is Also a Lover of Life': *Creatio ex Nihilo* and Creaturely Goodness," 102.
114 Psalm 62:11-12, NRSV. The coordination of God's power to save and his identity as Creator is a common theme of the Psalms: see, for instance, Psalm 74:12-17 and Psalm 104.
115 Webster, "'Love is Also a Lover of Life": *Creatio ex Nihilo* and Creaturely Goodness," 103-104.

goodness to realization, for this would make the creator's goodness depend on the creature. God's goodness is not the result but the cause of his creating."[116]

It was historically through the Christological debates that this way of conceiving the relationship between infinite and finite was worked out,[117] and it may be that the first part of Thomas' *Summa*, containing his doctrine of God and of creation, is oriented toward the third part, his Christology. Rowan Williams writes that "…what Aquinas achieves, more successfully than any previous theologian (and more successfully than most later ones too, given the awkwardness of Scotus's language about Word and human beings as *aliquid* in much the same sense), is to develop a vocabulary in which the union of divine and human in Jesus is in no way the fusion of two comparable metaphysical subjects."[118] What the debates that led to Chalcedon clarified, Williams believes, was the fact that it is the eternal Word that brings about the union of the two natures, bringing about a substantial change in the human nature but not in the divine,[119] a logic that later opens the intellectual space necessary to articulate both the real distinction and the mixed relation that exists between God and his creatures.

Tertullian and Irenaeus both advanced their understanding of *creatio ex nihilo* largely on Christological grounds. Incarnation and resurrection testify not only to the goodness and vindication of the material world (over against gnostic suspicions), but cement the nature of the transcendence of the Creator, so truly radical that it does not preclude his eternal and immutable life being known

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[116] Webster, "'Love is Also a Lover of Life": *Creatio ex Nihilo* and Creaturely Goodness," 104.
[117] This is compellingly argued and narrated by Aaron Riches, *Ecce Homo: On the Divine Unity of Christ* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2016).
[118] Williams, *Christ the Heart of Creation*, 26.
[119] Williams, *Christ the Heart of Creation*, 65.

under the terms of humanity. Without abandoning the principle that *finitum non capax infiniti* (the finite cannot contain the infinite), the fathers realized that the incarnation meant that "[f]or the Christian confession, God is *capax finiti* - precisely because he is the true infinite who can call creaturely forms and acts into his service without compromise either to his own freedom or to the integrity of the creature."[120] Michael Hanby argues that for Tertullian, the incarnation and resurrection of Christ mean "that materiality be included within the one order of being reconceived entirely as free and contingent gift."[121]

Irenaeus connected *creatio ex nihilo* directly and explicitly to God's sovereign power to save. Writing again against Gnosticism, he asserted that "He is alone God, alone Lord, alone creator, alone Father, and alone contains all things and bestows existence on them,"[122] and "men indeed cannot make anything out of nothing, but only out of material already before them; God is superior to men in this prime respect, that He Himself furnished the material for His creation although it had no previous existence."[123] Whereas Justin, following the Gnostics, was unable to see God as directly active in creation (either in the act of creation itself or in other work that Christian theologians would call *ad extra*),[124] Irenaeus could affirm as a direct implication of the doctrine of creation from

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[120] John Webster, "Principles of Systematic Theology," in *The Domain of the Word*, (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012), 138. Webster is quick to note that this is a free work of mercy; no creaturely overcoming of *finitum non capax infiniti* is possible, because the distinction between the created and uncreated cannot be reversed. Aquinas would not disagree, but for Webster, this is sufficient to suggest that it is accommodation, not participation in a metaphysical or substantial sense, that is the operative concept here. Webster, *The Domain of the Word*, 138-139.
[121] Michael Hanby, *No God, No Science?* (Chichester, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), 80-81.
[122] *Against Heresies* 2.1.1, in Ante-Nicene Fathers, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, 10 vols. (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), hereafter ANF, quoted by Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 86.
[123] *Against Heresies* 2.10.4, quoted by Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 86.
[124] McFarland, *From Nothing*, 12.

nothing that there was simply no independent being or force that could limit God's power to act in and for the world he had made: "Neither the nature of any created thing,… nor the weakness of the flesh, can prevail against the will of God. For God is not subject to created things, but created things to God; and all things yield obedience to his will."[125]

It is this connection, between God's power to save and his identity as Creator, that I wish to highlight in considering the ontology presupposed by the reformed doctrine of justification. Our ultimate question (as it must be in any exercise of theological reasoning, if we are to follow Webster's advice) must be Who is God, this one who is both Creator and Redeemer, both our Maker and our Husband?[126] We will argue that there is an analogy to be drawn between creation from nothing and justification by faith: that the same God who establishes reconciliation from enmity is the God who brings life from death, and the God who creates from nothing.[127] The reformers were charged with making man utterly passive in his salvation by their doctrine of justification by faith, focused on the imputation rather than infusion of righteousness; a similar danger lies beyond the doctrine of creation from nothing, which threatens to evacuate creation of its reality, landing in pantheism or panentheism if due metaphysical caution is not exercised. For that reason, I want to describe now the metaphysical foundation which, I argue, best guards both *creatio ex nihilo* and justification by faith – namely, the participatory ontology developed by Thomas Aquinas.

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[125] *Against Heresies* 5.5.2, quoted by McFarland, *From Nothing*, 13.
[126] Isaiah 54:5.
[127] Romans 4:17.

Participatory Ontology

❖ Essence and Existence

Rudi te Velde argues that Thomas' account of participation (worked out largely in his commentary on Boethius) overcomes a major tension between a Platonic participatory ontology and an Aristotelian substance metaphysics. The tension pertains to how it is that an account, drawing on Plato's understanding that individual entities exist only by participation in the forms and, ultimately, in being itself ("the Good," etc.) can allow for the otherness and relative self-sufficiency of creation.[128] The major achievement of Aquinas' Christian synthesis of Platonist and Aristotelian metaphysical categories was fully to work the logic of *creatio ex nihilo* through his participatory account in a way that answered this conundrum, delivering an account of creation that safeguards its integrity as creation without making of it a rival autonomous locus of being alongside the creator.

In his commentary on Boethius we find that for Aquinas, it is axiomatic that whatever something is by substance it is not by participation, and vice versa – we speak of participation when something has in particular fashion what another has universally.[129] Thomas thus teaches that creation is entirely dependent on God, the creator, for all perfections, which He alone possesses of himself and which

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[128] This question has been well examined by Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, and see also, more recently, Adrian Pabst, *Metaphysics: The Creation of Hierarchy* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012), Riches, *Ecce Homo*, and Williams, *Christ: The Heart of Creation*.

[129] *In de hebd.,* lect.2, n. 34. See also ST Ia.44.1: "…whatever is found in anything by participation, must be caused in it by that to which it belongs essentially." … "…from the fact that a thing has being by participation, it follows that it is caused."

creatures possess only by participation in Him.[130] This includes the perfection of existence itself, and this is true not only of creation's origin but of its ongoing life; thus, alongside the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* stands that of *creatio continua.*[131] The relationship between God and his creation is thus constitutive of the creature; it is only in relation to God that the creature exists at all.[132] Webster writes that the "being of the creator is *per se*, that of the creature 'an existing which is a relation to a source.' This is not to deny that the creature possesses being, but to indicate whence and how it does so."[133]

Thomas explicitly rejects Boethius' claim that a participated property is of necessity an accidental one, which would imply that the essence of a thing must be some way self-subsistent and autonomous, logically prior to its participation in anything.[134] But this would seem to suggest that whatever is essential to a thing must exist prior to participation, such that it would not have being itself by participation. On the contrary, Aquinas insists that participation in being is constitutive of created being; the receiving subject is itself part of the gift.[135] God distinguishes himself as cause, and this is how he causes.[136] And yet, such is his power as creator that he, the primary cause, is the cause of all secondary causes, which truly exercise causal power in a mode appropriate to creatures. As Kathryn Tanner puts it, "God's creative agency must be said to found a created cause in the very operations by which it proves sufficient to produce an effect

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130 ST Ia.44.1.
131 ST Ia.104.1.
132 ST Ia.45.3.
133 Webster, "*Non Ex Aequo*: God's Relation to Creatures," 121, citing David Burrell, "Act of Creation with its Theological Consequences," in Thomas G. Weinandy et al., *Aquinas on Doctrine* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2004), 39.
134 Rudi te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Brill, 1995), 33.
135 Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, 158-159.
136 Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, 158-159.

within the created order."[137] Aquinas' participatory metaphysic carries with it a dynamic of reciprocity: the act of the creature is the form of the divinely given gift in which it participates. The dynamic is always asymmetric, for the divine gift does not in any way depend on the return gift of the creature, and yet we can say that the reciprocal gift is the condition of the gift being given.[138]

It is also in interaction with Boethius that Aquinas develops the distinction between *essence* and *existence* which was so fundamental to the analogy of being as Erich Przywara came to understand it.[139] Specifically, Aquinas found participated being to be the key to the question asked by John the Deacon: "how a thing can be good in virtue of its being without being substantially good." That is, if being is itself good, then how can it be that a thing that exists is not *essentially* good? Aquinas' answer is participated being. Aquinas draws a distinction between essence and existence and notes that it is not of the essence of any creature to exist, but that the existence of the creature is pure gift and is held together with the creature's essence in what Erich Przywara called "tension-in-unity."[140]

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[137] Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 92; see also p. 97. Rowan Williams, drawing on Austin Farrer to similar effect, points out that infinite causality cannot simply fill a gap in a series of finite causes. "What infinite agency causes simply *is* the system of secondary causality within which we finite agents act. … What it means for infinite causality/agency to be at work *is* that a system of finite causes is operating – not that a more impressive instance of finite causality is invoked to complete the picture." Williams, *Christ: The Heart of Creation*, 2.

[138] See John Milbank, "Can a Gift Be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic." *Modern Theology* 11 (1995), 135: "The divine gift of existence passes across no neutral territory in which it may be refused by a pre-existent receiver, for the return of the gift is itself the creature's existence – God does not need the return, but the return constitutes the receiver as reciprocal giver."

[139] Erich Przywara, *Analogia Entis (Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm)*, trans. John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014).

[140] John R. Betz, translator's introduction to Erich Przywara, trans. John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart, *Analogia Entis (Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm)* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014), xx.

"Every being is good as such; but no created being is good by its essence, just as it does not have being by its essence," as te Velde puts it.[141] Thomas extends participation to the being of the thing itself: participation in the good *is* the substantial good of created things.[142] Przywara, drawing on Aquinas' treatise on essence and existence,[143] noted that for God alone do essence and existence cohere in "identity-in-unity." God is simple, that is, without composition or parts, and so essence and existence are one and the same for God alone, who uniquely is self-subsistent and autonomous. This is the crux of Thomas' insistence that being "is not a genus, since it is not predicated univocally but only analogically"[144] of God and creatures.

This distinction will become crucial for understanding how Aquinas' participatory metaphysic avoids panentheism. In particular, it will be crucial to note that in Aquinas' participatory metaphysic, full ontological participation in the being of God *defines* creaturehood, setting creation apart from the self-subsistently existing Creator. In the context of the current essay this is of concern because reformed theologians have tended to regard participatory ontology as harboring the threat of pantheism or panentheism, dissolving the Creator-creature distinction. On the contrary: creaturely participation in the divine being *establishes* the real distinction that Thomas identifies between God and his creatures, because it implies that

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141 Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, 44.
142 Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, 29.
143 Betz, "Translator's Introduction," xx.
144 John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 75, cf. 110. "To say this," Williams writes, "is to say what Aquinas and those who have followed him… have said about the relation of finite and infinite: they do not 'add up.' God and the world are not two *of* anything; and so likewise, the Word and Jesus are not two of anything. Similarly, the world is not a component part of God, nor God a component part of the world; and Jesus is not a part of the divine life, nor the Word an element in the composition of Jesus." Williams, *Christ: The Heart of Creation*, 36.

that creatures are compositions of essence and graciously given existence, where in the simple God who uniquely is *ipsum esse subsistens* there is no composition at all. And, as we will see below, in the absence of a participatory ontology reformed theologians, seeking to do justice to God's sovereignty, have themselves fallen into a panentheist position that evacuates creation of its creaturely reality and its otherness from God.

❖ Aquinas on Creation

For Thomas, the participatory ontology undergirding his understanding of creation is a function of the doctrine of God. It is only after he considers the procession of the divine persons that he turns to the question of the procession of creatures from God. The crucial idea running through Thomas' explication of creation is that God uniquely is *ipsum esse subsistens*, being in itself, what Przywara would refer to as an "identity-in-unity" of essence and existence. All created things are from God as their efficient cause,[145] and at the same time oriented to God as their final cause.[146]

But how, if this is the case – and if God is one (as *ipsum esse subsistens* must be) – can we account for the multiplicity of creatures? It might seem that if all things are from God and oriented to God, then all things must be alike (and, it is tempting to think, do not have any separate existence from God at all). The reason, Aquinas argues, is that "in the divine wisdom are the types of all things, which types we have called ideas – i.e. exemplar forms existing in the divine

[145] ST Ia q.44.1.
[146] ST Ia q.44.4.

mind."[147] As Gregory Doolan has argued, the divine ideas serving as exemplar causes are the formal cause of all things – that "according to which" they are made.[148] The variety of created things derives from the fact that although God is one and God is simple, God knows himself in a plurality of ways.

Formal causation is of crucial importance to Aquinas' understanding of creation. Causality, for Aquinas, is the communication of form. Following Aristotle, Aquinas understands primary matter as the capacity to receive form; unlike Aristotle, however, Aquinas rejects the idea that primary matter is eternal. It too must be created by God;[149] in other words, God is not only the primary efficient cause, the final cause, and giver of the divine ideas that serve as the exemplar formal cause for all things, but he also creates the very capacity to receive that form. There is no pre-existing matter upon which God impresses form; because creation is *ex nihilo*, God communicates both form and the capacity to receive it in one act. "It is reasonable," writes Aquinas, "that the first passive principle should be the effect of the first active principle."[150] As Michael Hanby notes, "[m]atter thus understood has no independent positive existence; its existence is always relative to the form of the being whose matter it is."[151] Hanby goes on to note that this implies that for Aquinas, as for Aristotle, "things 'existing by nature,' … are distinguished from artifacts in that the former 'has *within itself* a principle of motion and rest in respect of place, or of growth and decrease, or by way of alteration' (*Physics*, II.10-II.15). … there is never an actual 'this,' … which

147 ST Ia q.44.3; see also ST Ia.15.1.
148 Gregory T. Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008).
149 ST Ia.44.2.
150 ST Ia.44.2.
151 Hanby, *No God, No Science?* 59.

is not always already determined as this or that kind of 'what.'"[152] Form is thus the ontological identity which gives meaning to the parts, for whose sake they develop: form is last in generation but first in the order of being.

This act of creation, it must be noted, does not involve motion or change – not in God, in whom there is no potency to be actualized, nor in creatures, because "what is made by movement or by change is made from something pre-existing."[153] Creation is from nothing, and so it is not a matter of something changing into something else. Creation is nothing but a certain relation in the creature to its Creator.[154] This is not to deny that there *is* motion and change, and that such is involved in the natural order of causation; creatures can be causes. But in creation itself, no creature comes between God and the creature as intermediary; only God gives being, because, again, God alone is *ipsum esse subsistens*.[155] It is this that gives rise to a structure in creation that does *not* pertain to God. The relation between Creator and creature is real on the side of the creature only; it is a constitutive relation. "[E]ven though it is said in [Aristotle's] text that form comes to be in matter, this is not a proper way of speaking; for it is not a form that comes to be, but a composite… The proper way of speaking is to say that a composite is generated from matter according to such and such a form (*In Metaph*., lect. 7, 1423)."[156] There is no form that is not instantiated in a particular creature, no matter that exists on its own, abstracted from particular form.

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[152] Hanby, *No God, No Science?* 60.
[153] ST Ia.45.3. Cf. Simon Oliver, *Philosophy, God and Motion* (London: Routledge, 2005).
[154] ST Ia.45.3.
[155] ST Ia.45.3.
[156] Quoted in Hanby, *No God, No Science?* 58.

Creation and Justification

We now take the next step along Webster's advised method: having shown how the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is grounded in the doctrine of the perfectly simple God for Thomas Aquinas, we next ask how the doctrine of justification might best be founded upon a metaphysically robust doctrine of creation. Vanhoozer argues that the reformation project, focused as it was on a recovery of the economy of grace and a soteriology based on God's unmerited favor to sinners in communicating life in Christ, nonetheless presupposes an ontology and a teleology – a ground and a purpose.[157] What I will argue is that the ontology most naturally presupposed by the reformed doctrine of justification by faith is a robust doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* grounded in a Thomistic participatory ontology, preserving the integrity of Thomas' synthesis of Platonic and Aristotelian metaphysical categories and biblical doctrine that finds expression in his articulation of the real distinction between essence and existence, an asymmetric reciprocity between divine and creaturely action, and the analogy of being.

The primary reason that this set of doctrines hang together and, I argue, holistically support reformed concerns for justification and providence is because they all ultimately derive from the Christian insistence on divine simplicity, which immediately distinguishes between the creator, in whom essence and existence are united in identity, and creatures in whom they are held united in tension by their creator. This is the single root from which springs the common logic held

[157] Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel*, 37.

by a Thomistic metaphysics of creation, taken as a whole, and reformed teaching on justification and providence.

In reformed theology, justification is a constitutive word. It is a declaration that makes real what it declares. In his Heidelberg Disputation, Luther sums it up well when he writes "The love of God does not first discover but creates what is pleasing to it. The love of man comes into being through attraction to what pleases it."[158] In support of this thesis he explains that it is God as creator *ex nihilo* who is in view here: the one who is bound by no external criteria or obligation, even of attraction, but who *creates* by word and spirit what is pleasing to him.

> Therefore sinners are attractive because they are loved; they are not loved because they are attractive. For this reason the love of man avoids sinners and evil persons. Thus Christ says: 'For I come not to call the righteous but sinners' [Matt. 9:13]. … This is the love of the cross, born of the cross, which turns in the direction where it does not find good that it may enjoy, but where it may confer good upon the bad and needy person.

God requires nothing good in the "bad and needy person" other than what he himself supplies – both the good and the capacity to receive the good are gifts. If this were not the case then God would face a constraint: he would be able to confer good only on those in whom he found the proper "material." God is the one who creates out of nothing, who brings life out of death, who calls into being

[158] Martin Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation*, Thesis 28, cited in Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 112. I cite Forde's little book rather than the standard critical editions of Luther's works in order to draw attention to his fine study and the fruitful comments he provides to accompany Luther's text.

that which is from that which is not. In this Luther follows Irenaeus, who grounded God's power to save on his power to create from nothing.

The relationship between God as redeemer and those he justifies is best understood as analogous to the relationship between God as creator and the cosmos he creates: it is a relationship that is real on the side of the creature only. In both creation and justification, God gives existence to what is not God: created being from nothing in creation, living hearts of flesh from what was dead in justification. Ontologically, this translates to participation; soteriologically, it translates to unmerited grace shown to sinners whose hearts are regenerate, enlivened by God's spirit, *before* they can offer the proper response of faith and repentance.[159] *Creatio ex nihilo* implies that the existence of the creature is part of the gift it receives; the reformed doctrine of justification by faith implies that the existence of a heart of flesh in place of a heart of stone is part of the gift received by the redeemed in God's work of new creation.[160] As in creation, justification is that by which eternal life comes to be.[161] It is no wonder that salvation is spoken of in such terms as new creation, rebirth, life out of death: the structure of justification is the same as the structure of creation from nothing. Both are participatory; both are asymmetrically reciprocal.[162] Again, these relationships are real on the side of the creature only. God gains nothing and is not obligated to

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159 Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel*, 74.

160 2 Corinthians 5:17.

161 "God's creative love is not the recognition, alteration or ennoblement of an antecedent object beside itself, but the bringing of an object into being, *ex nihilo* generosity by which life is given. By divine love, the 'infinite distance' which 'cannot be crossed' – the distance between being and nothing – *has* been crossed." Webster, "Trinity and Creation," 93, citing Aquinas, ST Ia.45.2 obj. 4, ad 4.

162 "Faith is not empty, but effectual through love – and yet it does not borrow from love the power to justify." Riissen, quoted in Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics,* 561.

create or to redeem; neither of these works *ad extra* increase his glory or, indeed, change him in any way.[163]

Participation is the ontology presupposed by justification because both have the same structure. Recall that Thomas says that "…whatever is found in anything by participation, must be caused in it by that to which it belongs essentially."[164] In justification, sinners receive life from him who has it in himself. An analogy may be helpful. The relationship between justification and the justified is analogous to the relationship between God's creative word "Let there be light!" and the light. Importantly, that relationship is *not* analogous to the relationship between any properties of light (including its existence) and the light itself. Just as the light does not depend on any pre-existing characteristics or on its own pre-existent "availability" to God, but *receives* its existence as part of the gift of God's constitutive word of creation, so likewise the life enjoyed by those who are justified does not depend on anything pre-existing in the sinner. The lines of this argument simply follow Luther's rejection of the nominalist *via moderna* contention that God gives grace to those who "do what is in them." The point here is to note the analogy to the structure of creation and the participatory framework that naturally fits the doctrine of creation from nothing. This is not to say that there is no distinction between creation and justification; as Vanhoozer rightly notes, "it is important to distinguish the grace of participation in being (created existence) from the special grace of participation in Christ

[163] "God's creative love is not 'a love which is needy and in want' and so 'loves in such a way that it is subjected to the things it loves'; God loves not 'out of the compulsion of his needs' but 'out of the abundance of his generosity.'" Webster, *Trinity and Creation*, 93, citing Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, in *The Works of Saint Augustine*, vol. I/13, *On Genesis* (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2002), I.13.
[164] ST Ia.44.1.

(covenant existence), and from the further grace associated with the Spirit's illumination."[165] The point is not to dissolve the lines between these three but to observe their structural similarity, and to suggest that the reformed doctrine of justification presupposes the same participatory ontology that follows from the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. Again, Vanhoozer:

> Here is the ontological point: grace is not some third thing between God and human beings, a supernatural substance or power that gets infused into nature to perfect it. Rather, grace is the gift of God's beneficent presence and activity – that is, the communication of God's own light, life, and love to those who have neither the right to them nor a claim on God. Grace is God giving what is not owed. Grace is God in communicative action *ad extra*. Grace is the economic Trinity, the means by which God extends himself toward others, first in creation and later in redemption. Put simply, grace is the Triune God – God sharing his Fatherly love for creation in the Son through the Spirit.[166]

The further point is to note that *absent* a participatory ontology, defenders of a reformed understanding of salvation and the soteriology of God can depart significantly from an orthodox understanding of creaturely being and the relationship between God and creation, most often by evacuating creation of its relative self-sufficiency, its *reality*, its true *otherness* from God. In doing so, reformed theology falls into panentheism. Here, as John Betz puts it, one cannot speak of a real *relation* between God and the world "since the integrity of creation is so denigrated on account of the fall as to become an illusion… God in effect is or does everything and creation in effect is or does nothing (rendering human being and freedom an illusion)…"[167] Space precludes the enumeration of many examples, but one particularly striking case is the panentheist and occasionalist metaphysics of Jonathan Edwards. We will return to this example below, and I

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[165] Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel*, 49.
[166] Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel*, 53.
[167] John R. Betz, "Translator's Introduction," 52.

will argue then that these failings are not due to the core commitments of Edwards' reformed theology or that of anyone else – chief among them justification by grace through faith – but to the metaphysical frame in which reformed theology has often been worked out. My suggestion is that Thomistic participation is not only not inimical to reformed theology, but is in fact the most natural metaphysical frame in which to situate both creation from nothing and justification by faith, which, I have argued, both follow the same logic of constitutive word.

The strongest participationist language in the New Testament speaks of participation in Christ. The reformers made union with Christ a major theme of their soteriology. But even this theme can verge toward an evacuation of the creature if it is carried out in a metaphysical frame of univocity. Here Karl Barth provides the example; in writing of the "effective protest" that Jesus lodges against our self-negation, he argues that the human nature of Jesus "spares us and forbids us our own."[168] Without ontologically participatory categories, God and creature compete for causal space; with such categories grounding our soteriology we find room for a properly Christological soteriology that *restores* rather than evacuating our human nature. Metaphysical participation is no less Christological: in Him we live and move and have our being. As McFarland points out, the church fathers turned to John 1 before Romans 4 or Hebrews 11 to understand creation from nothing,[169] and indicated that "the indefeasibility of God's power is somehow bound up with the relationship between the Father and

[168] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/2, trans. H. Knight, G.W. Bromiley, J.K.S. Reid, R.H. Fuller (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), hereafter CD III/2, 47.
[169] McFarland, *From Nothing*, 22.

Son."[170] Thomas was clear on how the works of God *ad extra* are grounded in the relations *ad intra*:

> God is the cause of things by His intellect and will… God the Father made the creature through His Word, which is His Son; and through His Love, which is the Holy Ghost. And so the processions of the Persons are the type of the productions of creatures inasmuch as they include the essential attributes, knowledge and will. … For, as above stated, to the Father is appropriated power which is chiefly shown in creation, and therefore it is attributed to Him to be the Creator. To the Son is appropriated wisdom, through which the intellectual agent acts; and therefore it is said: 'Through Whom all things were made.' And to the Holy Ghost is appropriated goodness, to which belong both government, which brings things to their proper end, and the giving of life – for life consists in a certain interior movement; and the first mover is the end, and goodness.[171]

Providence

The other doctrine that needs attention is providence. "Providence is a widely dispersed doctrine, straddling both theology and economy, because its theme is God's government of created reality in execution of his will for creatures…"[172] Here there is far less disagreement between Thomas and the classical reformed doctrines, though we will pay attention to some details of Aquinas' understanding of providence that were not emphasized, and were eventually attenuated, in reformed theology; for example, our next chapter will consider how Calvin and Owen respected the relationship between divine and human action, largely by virtue of a close adherence to Thomistic concepts.

❖ Aquinas on Providence

[170] McFarland, *From Nothing*, 24.
[171] ST Ia.45.6.
[172] John Webster, "On the Theology of Providence," in *God Without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology, Vol. 1* (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 128.

Aquinas treats the doctrine of providence as an immediate outgrowth of his doctrine of God. In the first part of the *Summa*, Thomas moves from a consideration of the procession of the divine persons, to the procession of creatures from God (the doctrine of creation), to God's governance of creatures.[173] In his discussion, Aquinas will make two crucial points connecting providence to God's act of creation, and to the nature and reality of that creation. First, Aquinas will connect creation to providence, even as he distinguishes them from one another. In creation, God gives existence and essence, united in tension (because no creature exists necessarily). The essence of any thing includes its perfection, the end to which it is ordered, and while this is *given* in creation, the course of the creature to its proper end is *governed* by God in providence. Second, because it belongs to the perfection of creatures that they themselves be causes in a secondary sense, God gives being to a natural order of causation which is not illusory, but real.

All things are subject to divine providence, Aquinas says, because the God who uniquely is *ipsum esse subsistens* gives not only being but perfection, "and this belongs to government."[174] We should take note immediately that providence is not a matter of God extrinsically guiding his creatures to ends which he

[173] John Webster has observed that providence can be treated in this way or moved from the doctrine of God to the doctrine of God's relation to creation. "The former placement has the considerable contemporary advantage of underscoring the relation of providence to the eternal divine counsel. The latter is probably most convenient, however, to display the coherence of the doctrine provided that the all-important backward connection to the doctrine of God is retained." John Webster, "Providence," in *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic,* edited by Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2016), 151. Elsewhere he has written that "placing providence after the doctrine of creation has the… advantage of ensuring that the doctrine of creation is not simply an account of origins, but inseparable from God's establishment of creatures with movement towards finality, superintended by his care." Webster, "On the Theology of Providence," 130.
[174] ST Ia.103.5.

determines subsequent to their creation, and to which the creatures are, in and of themselves, indifferent. Rather, the ends proper to the nature of each creature are given in their creation, so that the creature cannot be understood apart from its proper ends. The causality associated with providence thus has a component which is intrinsic to the creature, by virtue of it being what it is; providence is no mere extrinsic force pushing in opposition to the creature's nature, or pushing a creature that is indifferent because it has no nature. "It is not only in the substance of created things that goodness lies, but also in their being ordained to an end, above all to their final end which… is the divine goodness. This good order existing in created things is itself part of God's creation."[175]

Providence can be conceived of in two ways: God gives the perfection to the creature, and God also so governs his creatures that they attain to the ends he has given. Aquinas refers to the former as providence in the sense of design, and the latter as providence in the sense of the execution of the design.[176] For Aquinas, design is "providence itself," because it is the giving of perfection to the created thing.[177] And while Aquinas locates this gift in creation itself, in which God acts without mediation, he claims that not all God's works of providence are immediate. Rather, providence in the sense of execution may come about through the mediation of creatures as secondary causes. And in this case, to be a cause is itself among the perfections that God gives to the creatures which serve this mediate role. "It is a greater perfection for a thing to be good in itself and

[175] ST Ia.22.1 resp.
[176] It is important to note that Aquinas does not mean to imply a "design argument" such as is common to the modern era, in which God is invoked as the external explanation for the intricate designs found in a creation which – it is conceded – is in and of itself quite indifferent to attaining any particular end.
[177] ST Ia.103.6.

also the cause of goodness in others, than only to be good in itself."[178] This is part of the nature of those things: a natural order of secondary causation is part of what God has created. Aquinas insists that this statement magnifies God's creative power; it does not diminish his glory to say that the execution of his providence involves the mediation of creatures, but enhances it by affirming that the Creator is capable of causing some things to be which, in turn, cause other things to be. "If God governed alone," he writes, "things would be deprived of the perfection of causality. Wherefore all that is effected by many would not be accomplished by one."[179] In other words, to argue that God brings all things to their ends *immediately* implies that some things are not brought to their proper end, that of being causes – a contradiction.

It is the ontological distinction between God and his creation, between primary and secondary causation that do not compete with each other because they do not lie on the same ontological plane, that allows Aquinas to make this argument. Similarly, he acknowledges that nothing continues in existence without the active divine influence, because God alone is the primary cause of all things to which he gives being; God cannot make anything to have received its being from anything but himself.[180] But this does not mean that there is no causal relation between creatures, nor that there is no sense in which creatures depend on other creatures or on a temporal sequence of causality to be what they are. Causality is among the perfections given to creatures by God, and so within the natural order of causation some creatures depend on others in a particular sense, to be such as

[178] ST Ia.103.6.
[179] ST Ia.103.6.
[180] ST Ia.104.1.

they are, even as they depend on God in an immediate and universal sense in order to *be*.[181] Thus Aquinas argues that the natural order of causation is not illusory, but real. He says, "God created all things immediately, but in the creation itself he established an order among things, so that some depend on others, by which they are preserved in being, though he remains the principal cause of their preservation."[182]

As te Velde puts it, nature cannot explain the being of natural things as such, but only their particular mode of being – creatures function as secondary causes, which depend on a primary cause.[183] And because the secondary cause is subject to the primary, Aquinas assures us that God can act outside the natural order of causation.[184] Moreover, he claims that God is *capable* of acting immediately to move all created things, and indeed that God *does* work in every agent, yet still without effacing the causal power of created things. Were that the case, the order of causation would be undone, implying a lack of power in the Creator who gives that order being. "Indeed, all created things would seem, in a way, to be purposeless…"[185] For Aquinas, causality is the communication of form to matter, and to any action there are three principles: the end, the agent, and the form. God is the end and the one who gives and preserves form; he is the primary agent even where there may be creaturely secondary agents of causation.[186] "One action does not proceed from two agents of the same order.

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[181] ST Ia.104.2. In other words, all secondary causes have some particular being as their effect; in order to produce *this* being so that it becomes this *being*, a particular cause requires the immanence of the transcendent/universal power of God. See te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas,* 181.
[182] ST Ia.104.2.
[183] te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, 160.
[184] ST Ia.105.6.
[185] ST Ia.105.5.
[186] ST Ia.105.5.

But nothing hinders the same action from proceeding from a primary and a secondary agent."[187] Aquinas maintains that secondary causal power is real causation, created to be so by God, even as he insists that nothing happens outside the universal providence of God (God is *omnicausal* without being the *sole* cause of all that comes to pass).[188]

❖ Westminister on Providence

The doctrine of providence expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith does not differ greatly from that of Thomas Aquinas, and in places clearly follows his reasoning. The doctrine is treated in two places: the third and the fifth chapters. In the third chapter it is given in summary fashion: "God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established."[189] The similarities are immediate: providence is according to God's will, God's providence covers all that is and all that comes to pass, and yet God cannot be called the cause of anything evil and his providence does not diminish the real causal power of creaturely, secondary causes.

These points are elaborated in the fifth chapter: "God the great Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence,

[187] ST Ia.105.5.
[188] ST Ia.103.7.
[189] WCF III.1.

according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy."[190] That chapter continues with a chain of reasoning that is similar to that of Thomas Aquinas. First, the confession states that "[a]lthough, in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the First Cause, all things come to pass immutably, and infallibly; yet, by the same providence, he ordereth them to fall out, according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently."[191] And second, that God makes use of means in the course of executing his providence, but is free to work "without, above, and against them, at his pleasure."[192]

It is relatively unsurprising that the confession would mirror Thomas' language in this way; the doctrine of God was not a great source of controversy during the Reformation or its seventeenth-century consolidation into various confessional and catechetical documents, the primary disputes concerning matters of soteriology such as justification. William Twisse, the first moderator of the Westminster Assembly, cited both Aquinas and Scotus in justifying his support for language such as this, arguing that God produces both necessary and contingent effects, according to the nature of their causes.[193] In particular, when

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[190] WCF V.1.
[191] WCF V.2.
[192] WCF V.3. Compare to ST Ia.105.6: "If… we consider the order of things depending on the first cause, God cannot do anything against this order, for if he did so, he would act against his foreknowledge, or his will, or his goodness. But if we consider the order of things depending on any secondary cause, thus God can do something outside this order; for he is not subject to the order of secondary causes; but, on the contrary, this order is subject to him, as proceeding from him, not by a natural necessity, but by the choice of his own will; for he could have created another order of things."
[193] Richard Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice: Freedom, Contingency, and Necessity in Early Modern Reformed Thought* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2017), 234ff. Muller has extensively documented the extent to which the Reformers and the Reformed Scholastics cited both Aquinas and Scotus on this issue, countering the argument that the Reformation represented a shift away from Aquinas in a Scotistic direction on issues of divine providence, necessity, and contingency.

it comes to the effects caused by rational creatures, he cites Aquinas to support his contention that God creates creatures which are themselves contingent and which, therefore, are the cause of effects he brings about contingently.[194] With regard to God's will, Twisse contends, these effects come about necessarily because God is immutable; nevertheless, "The necessity following upon this will of God, is nothing prejudiciall to the liberty or contingency of second agents in their severall operations."[195] In following Aquinas on the matter of primary and secondary causation, the Westminster Assembly was merely continuing a pattern established at the Irish Convocation of 1615, which, presided over by Archbishop Ussher, produced the Irish Articles; the language from the third chapter of the Westminster Confession cited above comes almost verbatim from Irish Articles 3.11.

This consensus has progressed into the reformed tradition, finding expression, for example, in Heppe's *Reformed Dogmatics*. Heppe understands the doctrine of providence and of the divine decree to be extensions of the doctrine of creation and, therefore, of the doctrine of God. Because God is simple, "[t]he

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What binds together this eclectic use of sources, he argues, is a commonly held Christian Aristotelianism that sought to "retain the Aristotelian refusal of the deterministic implications of what has been called the principle of plenitude while at the same time identifying God as the cause of all things." Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice*, 317ff., and see also Richard Muller, "Not Scotist: Understandings of Being, Univocity, and Analogy in Early Modern Reformed Thought," *Reformation & Renaissance Review* 14/2 (2012), 125-148. Muller notes that Calvin on intellect and will could fit with Thomas or Scotus – or could simply reflect an underlying Augustinianism. Muller, 186, and see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles. In *The Library of Christian Classics*, edited by John T. McNeill, Vols. XX-XXI (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), hereafter *Institutes*, I.xv.7, II.ii.12; John Calvin, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, trans. G.I. Davies, ed. A.N.S. Lane (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1996), 21, and Richard Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Historical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 165-167.

[194] 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*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Tho Robinson, 1653), 1:95, cited in J.V. Fesko, *The Thelogy of the Westminster Standards* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2014), 103-104.

[195] Twisse, *The Riches of God's Love*, 2:64, cited in Fesko, *The Theology of the Westminster Standards,* 109. Twisse cites both Augustine and Aquinas (ST Ia.19.8) in support.

expression…" he writes, "of God's counsel, the decree of it, is to be distinguished only conceptually from the counsel, as from the nature of God Himself; it is not different essentially."[196] Heppe understands God's providence to make use of second causes according to concurrence, in which providence is mediate and ordered, but not conditioned by the creature. "God's 'concurrence' does not therefore do away with the activity of second causes; on the contrary it is actually posited and sustained by the 'concurrence.'"[197]

"Causes," Heppe writes, "are of the same nature as their effects. The same effect by *diverso respectu* proceeds from a variable and an invariable cause."[198] God is active in second causes and indeed *must* be, as first cause: "That the world continues purely by divine preservation alone results from the fact that God is essentially absolute Spirit, the world essentially a dependent creature and therefore also dependent in its continuance, and that because the world is made out of nothing it cannot have the cause of its continuance in itself, but only in the omnipotence of the all-sufficient God."[199] But for precisely this reason, God has

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[196] Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 137. Heppe expresses the fact that God is unique in being not only *what* he is, but *that* he is – that is, in the fact that his existence is identical to his essence – in terms consistent with Przywara's understanding of the analogy of being, while also drawing directly on Exodus 3. Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 53. Again, this represents a tradition going back through reformed thought that simply accepted Thomas' understanding of the real distinction: Muller quotes Twisse as writing that "God is entitie by essence; every other thinge is an entity only by participation," in *A Discovery of D. Jacksons Vanitie*, 82, citing Aquinas. As Muller notes, "[e]lsewhere, Twisse will specifically deny the Scotist concept of the univocity of being." Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice*, 234, citing Twisse, *Dissertatio de scientia media tribus libris absoluta*, 305, which in turn cites Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 3, art. 1, ad. 7, and art. 2.

[197] Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 258.

[198] Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 266. For this reason, Heppe affirms the necessity of the consequence, though not the consequent. "To [the consequence] belongs all that God in his eternal counsel does through second causes, and therefore all that must be regarded as contingent; because, if God so willed, the second causes in individual cases might also produce another effect. Since in this way contingent things are always necessary as regards the first cause (i.e. the divine activity), they are at the same time really contingent as regards second causes, and that in such a way, that the contingency is based upon and maintained by the first cause." Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 267.

[199] Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 257.

no need of secondary causes, as though they were his instruments; as first cause he is *more* personally active in secondary causation than a craftsman is active in the use of his tools.[200]

There is little in these definitions that differs from Aquinas' language regarding providence, nor that directly conflicts with the participatory ontology that he employed. It is notable that Heppe in particular works with an ontology and a doctrine of creation that mirrors that of Aquinas. He notes, for example, in discussing the divine decree, that the *res decreta* cannot be considered the primary object of the decree, as though it pre-existed the decree and were standing by awaiting instruction, because the decree gives it existence.[201] Heppe thus observes the distinction between God and his creatures: where God is simple, such that his existence is identical to his essence, creatures are composites of essence and existence, both given in creation. What we will see when examining particular reformed theologians (particularly Edwards and Barth) is that it is difficult to avoid problematic aporia when the doctrine of providence is pressed through without observing this distinction.

The key problem is how nominalism conceives of the relation between God and his creation, and how it conceives of divine causality in extrinsic, rather than intrinsic, forms. It is commonly held that the modern era dropped all of the four-fold understanding of causality but one, retaining only efficient causality. Michael Hanby, however, has argued that modernity has in fact retained all four

[200] Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 261. Heppe draws the conclusion from this that "the Christian has to put his trust not in them but solely in the living God."
[201] Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 140.

forms of causality (and indeed, "could not help but retain them"), but "in drastically altered form":

> We have seen that for Aristotle, as for Plato, causality is fundamentally the *communication of form* (Aristotle, *Physics*, III.1, 202a5-202a10). This is why… he is able to distinguish proper or *per se* causes from causes which occur *per accidens*. There is of course no room for such a distinction in Hume's paradigmatic example, the collision of two billiard balls. Such causes do not *account for* their effects by introducing a form. Rather they *produce* an effect, extrinsic and indifferent to the natures of both agent and patient.[202]

This shift, Hanby argues, does not merely single out efficient cause as the only operative form of causality; it radically changes its definition. For Aquinas (as for Aristotle), efficient causation is a single event in which form is introduced into matter, necessarily involving both causal agent and patient. The famous example of the builder building the house is intended to make this point: a builder is not truly a builder when he is not building, but is only in potency to being a builder. A builder is the efficient cause of the house only when he is actually building it. Thus, *being a builder* is intrinsic to the single event – the act – of building; Aquinas does not understand the efficient causality of the builder as being a matter of him coming from the outside, abstracted from any particular act of building, and *extrinsically* imposing his skill and force on indifferent matter.

Something similar is true of final and formal causality. The modern view of things is able to speak of design and of intention, but this is a matter of the intentions of a craftsman being imposed extrinsically on indifferent matter. For Aquinas, the form according to which something is created, and the final cause

[202] Hanby, *No God, No Science?* 67.

for which it is created, are both intrinsic to the thing itself. This is true of natural objects; indeed, it is what it means for a thing to *have* a nature, that it has within itself a principle of motion and rest.[203] A work of artifice, on the other hand, takes its form from the intention of the artisan. The distinction is between *natural* motion and *violent* motion. When a thing changes according to the introduction of the form intrinsic to the creature, this is natural motion, motion which reveals and demonstrates what the thing is. *Violent* motion is imposed from the outside, and is indifferent or even runs against the nature of the thing.[204] As an example – an acorn may, over a long period of time, develop into an oak tree, or into a desk. Development into an oak tree is natural motion; development into a desk is an example of violent motion because it occurs only when an artisan intervenes in nature and imposes her own intentions, according to the form she holds in her own mind.

This was why Aquinas held that *art imitates nature* – the work of an artisan is not the same as God's act of creation, but there is an analogy between the two. Commenting on final causality in nature, he writes, "it is clear that nature is nothing but a certain kind of art, i.e., the divine art, impressed upon things, by which these things are moved to a determinate end. It is as if the shipbuilder were able to give to timbers that by which they would move themselves to take the form of a ship."[205]

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[203] Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. P.H. Wicksteed and F.M. Cornford (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996), II.1-2.
[204] Oliver, *Philosophy, God, and Motion*, 89-90.
[205] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* (South Bend, Ind.: Dumb Ox Books, 1995), II.14.268. I am grateful to Simon Oliver for this reference.

As we have already noted, there is almost no difference between Aquinas' understanding of providence and that contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith. And yet, we will see that there are significant differences between Aquinas and other reformed theologians: we will consider Edwards and Barth. These differences, and the problematic conclusions to which reformed theologians have come in working out the implications of providence, are attributable to the metaphysical framework through which reformed theology has often been worked out. In particular, the modern era has moved all forms of causality from intrinsic to extrinsic, and has abstracted causal agents from indifferent matter. The modern understanding, founded on nominalism (which, precisely, denies that things have a *nature* by denying the existence of universals, insisting that they are mere *names* under which we group things), knows *only* violent motion, the imposition of force from the outside upon indifferent matter.[206] This gets theologically problematic when this framework is applied not only to the work of human craftspeople, but to God's work of creation – when he is considered an explanation for how things came to be as they are (as opposed to, say, evolutionary processes), a mere artisan imposing his will on indifferent matter, rather than as the transcendent creator that gives both being and perfection, out of nothing, to all things. The "as if" in Aquinas' comparison to a shipbuilder is important; in fact, a shipbuilder cannot give to the timbers that by which they would move themselves to take the form of a ship – but that is what God has done in communicating being and form to creatures in the act of creation. When this is forgotten, the assumption is effectively inverted – now, *nature imitates art* – and God is brought within the same ontological plan as

[206] Hanby, *No God, No Science?* 62.

creaturely causes, as though he were also a mere artisan, unable to effect formal or final causality in anything but by an extrinsic and violent mode. At this point, the difference between primary and secondary causation is lost, divine action becomes a threat to human freedom, and either God or creation must be collapsed into one another. As we will see, reformed theologians, committed to avoiding pantheism but working within a nominalist metaphysic, have, generally, swung to the other direction, evacuating creation of its reality or espousing some form of panentheism.

Chapter 2: Reformed Thomism in John Calvin and John Owen

Divergent Reformers

In his recent study of the centrality of Christology to the historic development of the doctrine of creation,[207] Rowan Williams identifies a significant tension between Martin Luther and the views of both Duns Scotus and Ockham on the one hand, and Aquinas on the other.[208] The tension is to some extent deliberate on the part of the reformer, who bothers with metaphysical scruples as little as possible, not because he was philosophically sloppy or failed to understand the metaphysics of his forebears, but simply because at the end of the day his interests were more practical and existential – what *works* mattered more to Luther than philosophical precision.[209] This tension centers in particular on the relation of the infinite to the finite, of the divine to the human, in the person of Christ – which cannot help but have impacts on the understanding of how Creator relates to creature in general,[210] extending to the relationship of divine

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[207] Rowan Williams, *Christ the Heart of Creation* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2018).
[208] Williams, *Christ the Heart of Creation*, 138.
[209] Simeon Zahl, "Non-Competitive Agency and Luther's Experiential Argument Against Virtue," *Modern Theology* 35, no. 2 (2019).
[210] Williams notes two particularly interesting tensions in Luther. The first has to do with his understanding of what it means to confess God's omnipresence, which treats ubiquity as an extension of physical presence rather than understanding it to mean, as the earlier tradition had done, the negative rejection of spatial categories as applicable to the divine. Williams, *Christ: The Heart of Creation*, 138-139. On the contrary, Williams argues, there's no *spatial* relation at all because spatiality is not applicable to the divine Word. "The Word changelessly 'occupies' all Heaven and Earth because the Word changelessly abides as that personal divine identity or agency in and through which creation is related to its maker. Thus it is in the *person* of the Word that the divine and the human find their *communication*, not by any modification of what 'nature' designates." Williams, *Christ: The Heart of Creation*, 164. The second is his understanding of the *communicatio idiomata*, or the communication of idioms, relating the human to the divine in Christ. Williams argues that Luther seems to have "thought that both divinity and humanity *as natures* were in some sense altered through the union, in such a way that Christ's human nature is genuinely endowed with new *natural* properties." Williams believes that Luther wants to *resolve* the tension between finite and infinite – but in doing so he fails to affirm that a finite agency can, without losing its integrity, be the medium for infinite agency, a truth at the heart of the incarnation. Williams, *Christ: The Heart of Creation*, 140-141. "The paradoxical problem raised by

and human action, the position of divine grace and human obedience in salvation, and the understanding of God's sovereign providence over all his creatures and their works. It is notable, then, that Williams also sees Calvin moving back in the direction of harmony with Thomas, in his Christology and understanding of creation and providence alike (if not, admittedly, in all respects of his understanding of salvation). What grounds this harmony is not so much that Calvin intentionally adheres directly to the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas, whom he cites infrequently in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and his sermons and commentaries. Rather, it is Calvin's appreciation for the church fathers (and especially Cyril, in the case of his Christology)[211] that ultimately forms the stream that feeds into mainstream reformed theology (as captured, for instance, in the Westminster Confession of Faith), bestowing upon it a similarity to Thomas, and divergence from Luther, on providence. Without following him on every point, Calvin draws near in his understanding of creation to the angelic doctor, known for his synthesis of patristic and Greek thought.

Luther and Calvin took distinctly different views over the relationship between God's providence and creation, something which is most clearly on display in a comparison of Luther's *Bondage of the Will* and Calvin's *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*. However, in this chapter we will consider two figures – John Calvin and John Owen - who are representative of the majority of the reformed tradition in

Lutheran Christologies is that, in a thoroughly intelligible and indeed laudable concern to do justice to the radically transformative effect of the Incarnation and the incorporation of creaturely life into uncreated communion, finitude itself is compromised or implicitly undervalued, as if it cannot be transformed without ceasing to be what God has made it to be." Williams, *Christ: The Heart of Creation*, 161.

[211] Williams, *Christ the Heart of Creation*, 141.

having little quarrel with Thomas over doctrines including the doctrine of God proper and divine providence.[212]

In the main, the Westminster divines, like much of the main thread of reformed theology that traces back to Calvin and to the Scottish Reformation (led by John Knox, a student of Calvin in Geneva[213]), read and approvingly cited Thomas Aquinas on the topic of causality – in particular, on necessity, contingency, and the application of both to secondary causes. In short, Westminster understood the sovereignty of God to work through secondary causes without doing violence to their freedom or agency as causes because it accepted how Aquinas appropriated Aristotle into Christian doctrine via the crucial filter of *creatio ex nihilo*.

The reformed period inherited from medieval theology the standard scholastic distinction between absolute and conditional necessity.[214] According to this distinction, an event can be truly contingent although ordained and foreknown perfectly by God, because God can will certain things to occur contingently. Such things are said to be conditionally necessary, or necessary according to the immutability of God's will (*necessitas immutibilitas*) without being absolutely necessary with regard to the thing itself.[215]

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[212] There is, of course, difference between Thomas and the reformed tradition on aspects of soteriology, particularly justification, as we will note.
[213] Bruce Gordon, *Calvin* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2009), 259-263.
[214] McSorley, *Luther: Right or Wrong?* 229.
[215] In WCF II.2 the confession asserts that "In his sight all things are open and manifest; his knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature, so as nothing is to him contingent, or uncertain." But contingent does not mean that something has no cause; it means that it could have been otherwise, and the divines maintain that the decree establishes creaturely contingency.

This is directly related to another standard scholastic[216] distinction between *necessity of the consequence* and *necessity of the consequent thing*. The latter refers to the absolute necessity of the thing itself; it is something which is necessary by virtue of the nature of the thing. Boethius, for example, gives the example that because all men are mortal, by the very nature of what it means to be man, the mortality of man is necessary by the necessity of the consequent.[217] This is the sort of necessity that we would call a logical necessity, something that can often be described by a syllogism.

Something that is necessary according to necessity of the consequence, on the other hand, is only necessary in a conditional sense. The standard example is the observation that if Socrates is running, he is necessarily not sitting. Socrates, of course, is not unable to sit down in an absolute sense – he can stop running and sit down. But he cannot do both at the same time. Aristotle explains that "that which is must needs be when it is, and that which is not must needs not be when it is not. Yet it cannot be said without qualification that all existence and non-existence is the outcome of necessity. For there is a difference between saying that that which is, when it is, must needs be, and simply saying that all that is must needs be, and similarly in the case of that which is not."[218]

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[216] Here, following Richard Muller, I am using "scholastic" to refer more to a method than to a set of doctrines, which is appropriate to this example as the distinction is one that runs from early medieval to post-Reformation scholastics, the latter on both sides of the Reformation divide.
[217] *De consoltatione philosophiae*, V, prosa 6: PL 63,861; Boethius uses the terms *necessitas simplex* or *naturae*, as opposed to *necessitas conditionis*, rather than *necessitas consequentis* or *absoluta*, as opposed to *necessitas consequentiae*, but the concepts are the same.
[218] Aristotle, *De Interpretatione*, in *The Organon, or Logical Treatises, of Aristotle: With the Introduction of Porphyry*, trans. O.F. Owen, 2 vols. (London: George Bell, 1889), ix (19a 23-27), cited by Richard Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice: Freedom, Contingency, and Necessity in Early Modern Reformed Thought* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2017), 95.

For Aquinas, necessity of the consequence involved contingent actions, or viable alternative modes of being. Running and sitting are contingent actions for Socrates; being mortal, on the other hand, is neither a contingent action or a mode of being that permits alternatives (e.g. being immortal), so like Boethius, Aquinas understands Socrates to be mortal according to the necessity of the consequent.[219]

Aquinas notes that to say that something is absolutely necessary, by necessity of the consequent thing, does not imply that the thing in question *exists* necessarily – indeed, no creature exists necessarily, but God alone.[220] Rather, the distinction preserves the possibility of real contingency in the world, even supposing that God has willed it. The temptation is to believe that because God's will is immutable, once he wills something to come to pass it is necessary, conditional on his having willed it. But this does not allow for God to be able to will that something come to pass contingently. It says that things are contingent only because, not being God, they need not exist and God need not will them – a true statement. But once God has willed something to exist, it can no longer be contingent because his will is immutable – a false one.[221]

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[219] "Something is said to be absolutely necessary because of a necessary relationship which the terms of a proposition have to each other. For example, man is an animal; every whole is greater than its part, and the like." St. Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate,* trans James V. McGlynn, S.J. (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), q. 23, a. 4, ad. 1.

[220] ST Ia.2.3.

[221] Kathryn Tanner's discussion of the distinction includes a helpful exposition of the underlying modal logic, although she does not address God's capacity to ordain that things come about by contingent means. Her conclusion is correct: "Only if God *had to will* what God in fact wills, only if the statement 'God wills that the world exist'… were itself necessary, would Thomas be inconsistent in claiming that the world's necessity does not follow from the necessary efficaciousness of God's will. … Thomas denies, however, that God has to will the world. … God does not have to will… any object that includes the non-divine." Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1988), 75-76. But this only gets at the fact that God is free to will or not to will created effects. What it does not address is that God also has the power to will created *causes*, including contingent causes, and when he does so –

Thomas held that God causes things to come about contingently by preparing contingent causes for them, which allows creaturely contingency to be compatible with a necessity according to the immutability of God's will.[222] He writes, "…the things known by God must be necessary according to the way in which they are subject to the divine knowledge… but they are not absolutely [necessary], that is, according to the way they are considered in their own causes."[223]

❖ Real Relations

When Aquinas describes real relations between beings, he refers to relations that are in some way constitutive of those beings. "[T]he creature by its very name is referred to the creator and depends on the creator who does not depend on it. Wherefore the relation whereby the creature is referred to the creator must be a real relation, while in God it is only a logical relation."[224] For example, when I became a father, the relationship between my son and myself was such that the relationship actually contributes to making each of us what we are: by virtue of that relationship, I am a father, and similarly my son is a son. This is also an example of a *reciprocal* real relationship: there is a symmetry to the way in which I

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when he wills that some effect come about by means of contingent causes – then the effect that he wills cannot defy him to become a necessary consequent; it is necessary only according to consequence, because God is not thwarted in creating contingent causes. Tanner does get at this later, in her discussion of Thomas' account of primary and secondary causation, which, she says, adheres to a rule according to which "God's creative agency must be said to found a created cause in the very operations by which it proves sufficient to produce an effect within the created order." Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 92.

[222] ST Ia.23.4.

[223] ST Ia.14.13. ad 3.

[224] St. Thomas Aquinas, *On the Power of God: Quaestiones disputate de potentia dei*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2004), hereafter *De potentia*, III.3 resp.; see also St. Thomas Aquinas, *De Malo*, tr. Richard Regan, ed. Brian Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 16.7 and ST Ia.13.7, Ia.28.1. "[I]n God [the relationship to the creature] is not a real relation, but only conceptual. The relation of the creature to God, however, is real." ST Ia.45.3.

am constituted as a father and my son is constituted as a son in our relationship to each other. Webster notes our tendency to extend this symmetry erroneously to the relationship between God and creatures: "on the basis of the fact that creatures are really related to God, we conceive of God's relation to creatures in a similar way."[225]

A *real* relationship contrasts with two other sorts of relationships described by Aquinas: *logical* relations, which are relationships according to reason or the mind only, and mixed relations, which involve both real and logical relations pertaining to the various terms. A logical relation is one which, because it occurs in the mind only, brings about no change in any of its terms. A good example of this sort of relation is what occurs when one groups various terms into a common genus – Lionel Messi among great athletes, for example. Relating Lionel Messi to great athletes in my mind brings about no change in either Messi or the set of great athletes. A mixed relation is one that involves both real and logical relations, including the relationship of God to his creatures. The importance of characterizing the relationship between God and creatures in this way, Webster writes, "is not to deny God's relation to creatures but to invest that relation with a specific character. It accomplishes this specification by indicating that God's simple perfection is such that he is not one term in a dyad, relatively or contrastively defined, and, by consequence, that God's creative will and action

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[225] John Webster, "*Non Ex Aequo*: God's Relation to Creatures," in *God Without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology, Vol. 1* (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 124. Webster quotes Aquinas here, who says that we are "unable to conceive one thing related to another, without on the other hand conceiving that relation to be reciprocal." *De potentia* I.1. ad 10, cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, ed. Joseph Kenny, O.P., available at http://dhspriory.org/thomas/ContraGentiles.htm, accessed January 29, 2016 (hereafter SCG) II.13.4 and St. Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, trans James V. McGlynn, S.J. (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994) IV.5 resp.

are unrestrictedly benevolent and beneficent, giving life simply for the creature's good. Precisely because God's relation to created things has no effect on the divine integrity, it is the outward enactment of his goodness."[226]

Louis Bouyer has described nominalism as "a radical empiricism, reducing all being to what is perceived."[227] What is critical about this account is what it means for causality. Bouyer goes on to say that this conceptual system "empties out, with the idea of substance, all possibility of real relations between beings, as well as the stable subsistence of any of them…"[228]

If nominalism "empties out" the possibility of real relations between created things, it will lead to an attenuated understanding of what it could mean for something to be created and yet come about contingently. An understanding of the real relation of the creature to God is essential for preserving the possibility of contingency at all. Divine and creaturely agency likewise exist in a mixed relation to one another; "divine agency is logically but not really related to its created effects."[229] Creatures are constituted by their relationship to God; God does not merely act upon them from outside, he gives them being.[230] If he were

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[226] John Webster, "*Non Ex Aequo*," 116. Williams draws attention to the extent to which, once again, Christological reflection has helped work out the way of speaking of the mixed relation between God and creation. He notes that Aquinas argued in his Christology that nothing is or can be added to the *esse* of being the divine Word by the human nature in which the Word is incarnate; that *esse* is what it is in virtue of its relation to the Father, and yet, when we speak of the divine Word theologically, we do not and cannot speak simply of this eternal subject but must speak of what the divine Word has done in the world. Williams, *Christ: The Heart of Creation*, 29, citing ST IIIa.17.2. Christology, Williams says, has to insist that the divine Word is unchanged by the union because to do otherwise would be to bring the Word into the finite order, displacing creaturely integrity. "…God's action works not by displacing but by intensifying from within the capacity of created agency." Williams, *Christ: The Heart of Creation*, 70.

[227] Louis Bouyer, *The Spirit and Forms of Protestantism* (Westminster, Maryland: Newman, 1956), 153.

[228] Bouyer, *The Spirit and Forms of Protestantism*, 153.

[229] Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 103.

[230] "Without this relation the creature would not be, because the creature is ordered to God and constituted by that ordering." Webster, "*Non Ex Aequo*," 123. Webster quotes Aquinas:

merely a force acting from outside, then we would be forced to accept *either* that he controls all things deterministically (so that contingency is evacuated) *or* that contingency is preserved by his failure to exercise control (so that providence is denied). But he is not a force acting from outside, because he is no creature; he is "outside the whole order of creation, and all creatures are ordered to him, and not conversely."[231] This means that God is no mere "first cause," which would be nothing but the first, most powerful *creaturely* force in a series of creaturely forces, necessarily set in competition with one another. Rather, God gives being to contingent causes, without competing with them on a single ontological plane; he exercises providential governance even over contingency without negating it. "God's will universally causes being and every consequence of being, and so both necessity and contingency."[232] Kathryn Tanner draws together Bernard of Clairvaux, Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth in support of the claim that if God wills the efficacy of created causes, then we cannot allow "talk of separate sufficiency. Where created causes are operative, it is improper to claim that God's work is separately sufficient for a created effect to the exclusion of created causes." Why? Would this statement not simply affirm God's power? On the contrary, it would deny it: "Such a statement is not well formed since God's creative intention includes in this instance the founding of created causes." But of course, second causes presume primary cause: "It is also not correct to hold a sufficient created cause is independent of divine agency: created causes that are

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"[T]hings that are ordered to something [*res habentes ordinem ad aliquid*] must be really ordered to it, and this relation must be some real thing in them. Now all creatures are ordered to God both as to their beginning and as to their end… Therefore creatures are really related to God, and this relation is something real in the creature." *De potentia* VII.9 resp. He then comments that "[t]his *ad aliquid* relation… is… that by virtue of which there is a creation and therefore an unfolding covenant…" Webster, "*Non Ex Aequo*," 123.

[231] ST Ia.13.7.

[232] *De Malo* 16.7.

sufficient within the created order for certain effects are only such through God's creative agency for them."[233]

Hanby points out that *creatio ex nihilo* denies "that any principle is coeternal and thus 'outside' God and thus remov[es] all trace of opposition (and therefore identity) between the being of God and the being of all that depends on him."[234] And once again, as Webster would suggest must be the case, this principle has most clearly been worked out through reflection on the triune God himself, in particularly in our Christology. Hanby writes,

> if one can conceive of a hypostatic union of natures that is 'unmixed and unconfused,' then one can conceive of divine agency in bestowing being that constitutes, rather than negates, the autonomy of the creature. This is why Aquinas will later be able to say that the autonomy of creaturely agency is not lessened but *established* by the fact that God gives creatures being… Because being is the actuality of all acts and the most interior of perfections, it must be that God, as the source of being, 'is in all things, and innermostly."[235]

Nominalist philosophy and the account of salvation and grace set forth in the *via moderna*[236] fit together coherently. In the *via moderna*, salvation is a cooperative endeavor between God and the individual, in which the individual does "that which is in him," and, while this in of itself could never come close to meriting God's favor, God is faithful to meet that effort with his grace. In the well-known *concursus* model, the individual and God, the individual's effort and God's grace,

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[233] Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 93, citing Bernard of Clairvaux, "De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio," as quoted by Hans Küng, *Justification* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 266; CD III/3, 133, where Barth agrees with Thomas at ST Ia.105.5, and SCG III.70.6.
[234] Hanby, *No God, No Science?* 82.
[235] Hanby, *No God, No Science?* 83, citing SCG II.6, 4 and ST Ia.8.1, resp.
[236] Preeminently represented by Luther's mentor, Gabriel Biel.

are sealed off from one another; each contribute their share to salvation, where the shares sum up to 100%.

Real relations as Thomas understood them are absent from this account, because neither the individual nor the action is changed or constituted by its relation to God or God's action – both simply are what they are, and are met and extrinsically assisted by God. Hütter cites Bouyer to this effect: "a grace which produces a real change in us, while remaining purely the grace of God, becomes inconceivable. If some change is affected in us, then it comes from us, and to suppose it could come also and primarily from God amounts to confusing God with the creature."[237] The theology of the *via moderna*, based on this nominalist metaphysical scheme, closed the soteriological circle by explaining that in fact, the change did originate, at least in part, in the human – so that humanity, even under the conditions of the fall, must retain the power at least to turn to God freely and unassisted by grace.

❖ The Creation of Contingency

Tanner argues that the nominalism of Biel and his contemporaries represented a trend toward using "traditional scholastic axioms and distinctions... in novel ways to propound the absolute freedom of human beings, an optimistic understanding of human powers of self-assertion apart from divine aid and a generally naturalistic view of being that excludes its dependence on God's immediate agency."[238] Tanner does not believe that nominalism *per se* gives rise to problems;

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[237] Bouyer, *The Spirit and Forms of Protestantism*, 153, cited by Hütter, *Dust Bound for Heaven*, 252-253.
[238] Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 132. Tanner's analysis relies on Heiko A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2000) and

in her argument, as long as talk of God's *potentia absoluta* and his *potentia ordinata* were understood as two aspects of a single order of divine operation – so that what God ordains, even what he ordains to come about contingently, is a manifestation of and does not contravene his absolute power – a balance could be maintained. Where Biel threw things out of balance was in that "these different aspects of the same agency and operation come to be reified as separate domains in a way that accords with modern tendencies of interpretation. The absolute power of God extends only so far; it is kept out of the created order that divine agency establishes *de potentia ordinata*. A dome is thereby formed, around a self-enclosed order of causes that proceed *ex puris naturalibus*."[239] For Biel, this was necessary to protect the freedom of the creature, but this was only because his scheme placed God's absolute power in a position to threaten that freedom, one in which divine and creaturely efficacy are included in a single "linear order of predication. … Necessity of consequence would imply the necessity of the thing consequent, to use the scholastic jargon."[240] This ultimately works its way into Biel's soteriology, in which humans "do what is in them" (*facere quod in se est*), and these human acts, although they derive from created grace, nonetheless become the independent, necessary and sufficient condition for the grace that ordains to eternal life.[241]

McSorley, *Luther: Right or Wrong?* She notes that her argument does not depend on the ideas she is discussing being attributed to Biel in particular, and indeed, Oberman refers to them as the "Ockham-Biel School," crediting William of Ockham alongside Biel. Tanner lists other scholars who would dispute Ockham's inclusion in this school. Tanner also allows for the possibility that nominalism could be pursued in a way that simply emphasizes divine power and the fact of what God has done, without necessarily leading the theologian to "deny God's ability to create beings with their own powers and efficacy…" Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 107.

[239] Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 134.

[240] Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 135.

[241] Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 136-139.

Nominalsim reduces contingency to mere chance, to what the Stoics had recognized as *fortuna*, something lying outside the will of God; it makes no allowance for a contingency *caused* by God, whose providence infallibly knows and ordains free, contingent creatures.[242] The Stoics had not conceived of such a contingency because they had not conceived of God as the truly transcendent creator, but as a being (or beings) within the world, a world divided into deterministic (and perfectly foreknown) fate and random (and hence unknowable) chance. Christianity had introduced a genuinely new problem into the question of necessity and contingency, by positing a transcendent, eternal, free, omniscient, and omnipotent God on whom all possibility and all contingency rests, one capable of truly creating contingency and immutably foreknowing free, non-necessitated actions. Augustine, in *City of God*, had pointed out the contradiction latent in holding to the Stoic understanding of fate and fortune for one who believes in the Christian God:[243] it amounts to holding that God does not foresee what he foresees, for if nothing can be contingent then God cannot foresee contingent events.

Why, for example, can Aquinas write that "…the things known by God must be necessary according to the way in which they are subject to the divine knowledge… but they are not absolutely [necessary], that is, according to the way they are considered in their own causes."?[244] Aquinas understood contingency

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[242] Calvin's allowance for contingency comes despite his also rejecting the notion of *fortuna*. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, in *The Library of Christian Classics*, edited by John T. McNeill, Vols. XX-XXI (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), hereafter *Institutes*, I.xvi.8.

[243] St. Augustine, *City of God* 5.8-11 (available in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, 14 vols. (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994-1999), hereafter NPNF.

[244] ST Ia.14.13. ad 3.

to be something intrinsic to the creature, according to God's act of creation: "things are said to be necessary and contingent according to a potentiality that is *in them, not according to God's potentiality*."[245]

For Aquinas, it is precisely because God as first cause is omnipotent that he is capable of creating truly contingent effects. He writes that "it is not because the proximate causes are contingent that the effects willed by God happen contingently, but because God has prepared contingent causes for them, it being his will that they should happen contingently."[246] God's will and decree are immutable and omnipotent, so much so that what he wills to come about contingently truly comes about contingently. In his commentary on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*, Aquinas notes that the conclusion that God's infallible knowledge and sovereign ordaining of all things implies that all things are absolutely necessary is in error because it rests on the presumption that the knowledge and will of God are like that of a creature.[247] They are not, because God knows things as they are in themselves, including knowing the contingency of that which, from the perspective of the human viewer or knower, is necessary. This contingency ultimately derives from the status of the known thing as created. The creature is neither absolutely necessary as a consequence of God's infallible knowledge of it, nor is it absolutely free as a result of the contingency of the causes God has prepared for it. As Richard Muller argues, "it is a 'situated'

[245] SCG II.55, emphasis mine.
[246] ST Ia.19.8, ST Ia.14.13. ad 1.
[247] *De Interpretatione*, xiv.17-19

freedom operating according to the capacities of an ontologically dependent nature situated in a particular context in a temporal order."[248]

Calvin on Providence

We turn now to consideration of another magisterial reformer, John Calvin, and especially to the treatise he wrote on a topic similar to Luther's *Bondage of the Will*, aptly titled *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*. Like Luther, whose work was a response to a diatribe of Erasmus,[249] Calvin was writing to defend himself against attacks made on the 1539 edition of his *Institutes of the Christian* Religion by the Dutch Roman Catholic theologian Albert Pighius.[250] In this work, we will see Calvin hew closer to a Thomistic line on divine providence and the relationship between divine and human action. One of the key drivers of this difference, we will argue, was Calvin's willingness to appropriate Greek philosophical categories that had been central to Thomas's thought. Calvin was by no means an enthusiastic proponent of Aristotelian philosophy or disciple of Thomas *per se*, but as Lane has written, he "was not unwilling to invoke Aristotelian distinctions when these suited his purpose."[251] At the same time, Muller notes that in the *Institutes*, Calvin's desire to distance himself from Pelagianizing tendencies and a "lack of theological training and… continuing wariness of the medieval scholastics stood in the way of a full appropriation of scholastic distinctions that

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[248] Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice*, 137.
[249] Erasmus, *Diatribe seu collation de libero abitrio* (*Discussion, or Collation, concerning Free-Will*), 1524.
[250] For brief history of the work, see Anthony Lane's introduction to John Calvin, trans. G.I. Davies, ed. A.N.S. Lane, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1996), or Anthony Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 151-153. Lane points out that neither Pighius nor Calvin mentions Erasmus or Luther in the context of this exchange, and finds no evidence that either had the earlier debate in mind.
[251] Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers*, 182. Paul Helm has also argued for the influence of Aquinas on Calvin in Paul Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

later Reformed writers would employ in the resolution of issues concerning necessity, contingency, and freedom."[252]

❖ Calvin and Aristotle

The use of Greek thought was a major point of divergence between Calvin and Luther. Anthony Lane argues that "Luther, in the early years of the Reformation, was unremittingly hostile towards the use of Aristotle in theology."[253] Not so Calvin, who can frequently find resonance with Aristotelian concepts mediated to him through both the Fathers and the medieval church – approving, for example of the distinctions between "relative necessity and absolute necessity, likewise of consequent and consequence, [which] were not recklessly invented in schools…"[254] Lane points out that the clearest place to see Calvin's use and appreciation of Aristotelian thought, the Patristic tradition, and the common ground that he holds with Thomas Aquinas with regard to the relationship between Creator and creature is in his treatise *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*. Calvin's treatise, according to Anthony Lane's introduction, "is [Calvin's] fullest treatment of the relation between grace and free will, and contains important material which is not found elsewhere in his writings. It also contains far more discussion of the early church fathers than does any other of Calvin's works, apart from the *Institutes*, and is important for appreciating his use of the

[252] Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice*, 186.
[253] Lane, introduction to *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, xxiv.
[254] *Institutes* I.xvi.9. In a footnote, the McNeil and Battles edition of the *Institutes* connects this statement to ST Ia.19.3, and notes that "Barth and Niesel, citing Bonaventura, Duns Scotus, Erasmus, and Eck in agreement, point out Luther's rejection of this view in his *De servo arbitrio*…" *Institutes* I.xvi.9, fn. 21.

Fathers."[255] In the following section we will provide a close reading of Calvin's treatise, in order to elucidate Calvin's understanding of how divine and human action are related, informing his understanding of divine providence.

Calvin did not draw on Greek thought out of slavish devotion to philosophical structures – indeed, he rejected uses of philosophy that he found superfluous or distracting from the truths of scripture.[256] Lane notes that at most, Calvin's "use [of Aristotle in *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*] remains occasional rather than systematic."[257] Calvin's appreciation for Aristotle grew out of necessity, for he found in debate with Pighius that when pushed to clarify what he meant by conversion and what role human free will had to play in justification or sanctification, an "engagement with Aristotle and the fathers in opposition to Pighius enabled him to express the same teaching as before [in the 1539 edition of the *Institutes*], but with greater clarity and subtlety."[258]

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[255] Lane, introduction to *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, xiii. Lane notes that *Bondage and Liberation of the Will* contains more patristic citations than any other of Calvin's works apart from the *institutes* themselves, by a factor of three – which, he comments, is unsurprising given how much of the debate between him and Pighius revolved around which of them could claim the support of Augustine and other Fathers for their position on free will. Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers*, 151.

[256] See, for example, his grudging acceptance of the utility of the term *homoousios* in *Institutes* I.xiii.5.

[257] Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers*, 182. This points to a point of convergence between Calvin and Luther, and indeed common to all of the reformers: pagan philosophers were never more than a corroborating authority for what they viewed as the ultimate source of truth to be found in the pages of Sacred Scripture. Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, Vol. 2 (Holy Scripture),* 2nd Edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2006), hereafter PRRD.

[258] Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers*, 189. For more on Pighius' influence on the 1559 *Institutes*, see Anthony Lane, "Did Calvin Believe in Freewill?" *Vox Evangelica* 12 (1981): 81-83, and Anthony Lane, "The Influence upon Calvin of his Debate with Pighius," in *Auctoritas Patrum II: New Contributions on the Reception of the Church Fathers in the 15th and 16th Century*, ed. L. Grane, A. Schinder, and M. Wriedt (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2009).

❖ Calvin's Use of the Church Fathers in *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*

In Lane's extensive study of Calvin's use of the church fathers, he notes that Calvin names or cites 25 works of Augustine, three pseudo-Augustinian works, and 33 works by 19 other authors.[259] He also poses the question as to whether Calvin actually had the works in hand when he wrote, or whether he was working from memory, notes, or quotations in other works (such as Pighius himself). Adopting what he refers to as a "hermeneutic of suspicion," he requires positive evidence that Calvin *did* have the book in hand before he will include it.[260] His use of Augustine, though more extensive than that of any other author, was nonetheless restricted:

> It appears that Calvin turned to the works of Augustine for fourteen or fifteen works, making use of at least five of the ten volumes of the Erasmus edition. Despite this, his reading was confined to the anti-Pelagian writings and the *Retractationes*, apart from brief forays into the *De haeresibus*, necessitated by Pighius's attack on that front, and the *Enchiridion*. Given the subject-matter and the time constraint, it is hardly surprising that Calvin did not read more widely.[261]

Calvin's reading was also limited by his specific interest in demonstrating that the fathers (and particularly Augustine) could be marshalled in support of his position on free will, and lack of interest in doing much beyond this in the limited time he had leading up to the 1543 Frankfurt book fair.[262] Outside of

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[259] Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers*, 153-154. Table VI provides the details.
[260] For example, he will not include a work if Calvin simply quotes Pighius' own quotation out of it, or if the passage is found in the 1539 *Institutes* that he was defending from Pighius' attack, or if the citation is imprecise, falling short of an actual quotation. Positive evidence that Calvin had the work in front of him comes when none of the above is true, but the citation is a substantial quotation of text, or where Calvin refers to the position of the quotation in the cited text.
[261] Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers*, 157.
[262] Lane, introduction to *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, xiv.

Augustine, Lane finds evidence that Calvin had in front of him works of Basil, Irenaeus, pseudo-Clement, and Ambrose, as well as the councils of Carthage, Milevis, and Orange.[263] Of course, lack of evidence that he had a particular volume is not the same as evidence that he did not, and in any event Calvin draws on many more patristic sources in making his defense against Pighius.

Calvin spends significant time responding to Pighius' assertion that the church fathers taught that the unaided human will could turn to faith and will righteousness. As he works one by one through each of the patristic sources marshalled by his opponent, his argument takes one of two paths (or at times both).[264] The first is to pay careful attention to the context in which the Fathers were writing, and in particular the opponents to whom they were responding. These were typically espousing some form of Gnosticism,[265] denigrating the materiality and finitude of created human nature in favor of an immaterial mode of existence, and Calvin notes that in response they spoke of the capacities of human nature as it was created – material and finite, but also unfallen. Because Calvin's arguments about the enslavement of human nature to sin all pertain to fallen nature, this renders the citation irrelevant.

The passages quoted by Pighius from Origen, for example, all "deal with the nature of the man who was formed by God; they are completely silent about what kind of man he began to be after his fall and rebellion."[266] The passages

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[263] Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers*, 167.
[264] A third way that Calvin refutes Pighius is to claim that the works he cites were not truly the work of the Father named by Pighius; this, for instance, is how he dismisses Pighius' references to the works of Clement. Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 43-45, 70.
[265] Such opponents included Manichees, Marcion, and Valentinus; see Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 172.
[266] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 70.

cited from Tertullian and Irenaeus, similarly, all pertain to man as created, because they are both opposing Marcion (and, in the case of Ireneaus, Valentinus and Cerdo), all of whom traced evil back to creation and argued on that basis for a plurality of gods (since the creation could not be attributed to a single, good, god).[267] Jerome speaks only of man as created, and is silent on the corrupting effects of sin.[268] In all of these cases, Calvin defends against Pighius' attempt to identify the reformed understanding of the will with the Manichees: the difference between them, Calvin notes, lies in the distinction he draws between the will as created and as fallen, and between what is essential to the substance of human nature and what is mere accident and corruption.[269] Notably, many of these fathers were writing before the Pelagian controversy, and Calvin cites Augustine to the effect that one would not expect these writings to be of much value to the dispute he is currently undertaking – one cannot expect fathers who wrote before a given controversy arose to engage with it.[270]

The second strategy Calvin follows in reviewing the patristic sources (which he revered without venerating, never allowing them anything approaching equal authority with sacred scripture) is to claim that the Father in question has failed to distinguish between the substance of human nature as created and the accidental corruption incurred in the fall, in which case, as Lane writes, "he was heretical by the standard of later Catholic orthodoxy."[271] Just because half a dozen church fathers are agreed on some point, he claims, doesn't make it "the

[267] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 71.
[268] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 77-78.
[269] Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers*, 183.
[270] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 83.
[271] Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers*, 172-173.

sure and fixed consensus of the church";[272] Calvin argues that the only teaching that can be taken to be that of the church is that which is in accord with Scripture.[273]

He admits, for example, that Hilary speaks of a partnership between grace and human choice, extolling the latter too strongly in order to leave no corner for human laziness.[274] He comments, "I have certainly never denied that the ancients frequently extol free choice and ascribe to it more than is proper. But I gave a warning which I repeat now, that their teachings are either so divergent or so inconsistent or so obscurely expressed that almost nothing certain may be stated on their authority."[275] He likewise argues, consistent with what he had already written in the *Institutes* (II.ii.4), that Chrysostom makes too much of the power of free choice in the passages brought forward by Pighius. In rejecting Chrysostom's mistake, which (as Lane puts it) "was not to teach that we follow voluntarily but to suppose that we follow in a movement that is all our own,"[276] he once again quotes Augustine in a way that indicates the relationship between God as primary cause and creator and the creature as secondary cause: "it is

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[272] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 81.
[273] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 80.
[274] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 73-74. He had made the same argument in the *Institutes*; cf. 1539 *Institutes* II.ii.4.
[275] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 75. Calvin later cites the Council of Orange against Hilary. Hilary had written that "Our will has of itself a natural capacity to will, but once it begins to do so God gives an increase, and the merit of what is added derives from the will's initiative." *Treatise on Psalms* 118.14.20, cited by Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 81. The Council of Orange, however, had decreed, "If anyone argues that God waits for our desire that we should be cleansed from sin, and does not acknowledge that it is by the work of the Holy Spirit in us that we are even caused to want cleansing, he resists the Holy Spirit as it speaks through Solomon: 'The will is prepared by the Lord.'" Council of Orange (529), canon 4 (Leith 38), citing Proverbs 8:35, cited by Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 81. Calvin argues that Orange only confirmed what earlier councils had said; Lane points out that in fact Orange did add the need not only for grace, but *prevenient* grace (Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 82n251). Calvin, of course, would want to go even further than this, to a grace which is not only prevenient but efficacious. See also Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 188-189.
[276] Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers*, 188.

certain that it is we who will when we will, but it is he who causes us to will the good. It is certain that it is we who act when we act, but it is he who, by giving the will fully effective powers, causes us to act."[277] Echoing this sentiment in his own words, he later writes that "[i]t is not that we ourselves do nothing or that we without any movement of our will are driven to act by pressure from him, but that we act while being acted upon by him."[278]

In a later interaction with Chyrsostom, Calvin refers to Augustine in a way that demonstrates the underlying metaphysics of his position as pertains to divine and human causality. Pighius, he says, "wants to establish Chrysostom's view that 'whomever he draws he draws with their consent,'"[279] which Pighius takes to indicate that Chrysostom is arguing for the freedom of the will to choose God in an unqualified sense. Calvin's citation of Augustine is meant to clarify the sense in which he disagrees with Chrysostom, over against the sense in which he thinks Chrysostom is right (and cannot bolster Pighius' case). Chrysostom is correct to say that no one is drawn to God who is not drawn voluntarily, in accordance with his own will. Chrysostom's error, however, was to assume that this means "that they must follow in a movement that is all their own."[280] Again, Calvin's position is the Augustinian view that the will is at one and the same time truly proper to

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[277] *Grace and Free Choice*, 16.32 (NPNF 5:457), cited by Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 142. Earlier, Calvin cites several passages from Augustine to the same effect. For example: "These and other proofs show that God by his grace takes away the stony heart from unbelievers and preempts the merits of human good wills. [He does this] in such a way that the will is prepared by antecedent grace, rather than grace being bestowed because of the antecedent merit of the will." (*Letter* 217.7.28 (FoC 32:94)); "And how can anyone have a good purpose unless the Lord first has mercy on him, since a good will is precisely one which is prepared by the Lord?" (*Against Two Letters of the Pelagians* 4.6.13 (NPNF 5:422)); "…the mercy of God precedes the will itself, and if it were not there the will would not be prepared by the Lord." (*Retractions* 1.26 (FoC 60:114-115); "But this power to live well we also receive from above, when the will is prepared by the Lord." (*Retractions* 2.1.2 (FoC 60:120-121). Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 104-105.
[278] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 152.
[279] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 232.
[280] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 232.

the human, on the one hand, but on the other hand is the creation of God, who gives it existence and sustains it. God, in other words, is the ultimate and primary cause of the movement of the will, but the will is really and truly efficacious as secondary cause, and these two are not rival forms of causation, competing for causal space.

In a few cases, Calvin finds not only that the Fathers cited by Pighius are referring only to the substance of human nature as originally created, but that they then go on (in passages ignored by his opponent) to espouse the same position he holds about fallen human nature. Cyprian's position, for instance, appears identical to Calvin's – that man acts freely in sinning, and is "guided to live a good life by the Spirit of God, without any impulse from his own flesh."[281] Likewise, Pighius cites two passages from Basil. The first, Calvin writes, is "nothing but a description of human nature as it was created by God, a description designed to prevent people from passing on to God the blame for the evils they commit."[282] But elsewhere, when Basil speaks of free choice after the fall, he uses the language of bondage, leaving to man only the power to choose what is right, "which is both utterly ineffective and powerless by itself to overcome the passions."[283] The second passage cited by Basil likewise deals only with the soul as created, in its pure state; Calvin says that he agrees with Basil that when the soul is in its pure state, right reason guides the will and goes before it,

[281] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 72.
[282] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 75.
[283] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 76.

and the will is not ruled by the passions but attends to the guidance of the mind.[284]

Calvin's affinity for Aristotelian concepts that fit into a Thomistic understanding of creation and providence is on display several times as he interacts directly with the church fathers cited by Pighius. Summing up his position on Irenaeus and Tertullian, he identifies in them the substance/accident distinction that has been central to his own argument: "They argue that sin is not attached to his substance; we too affirm the very same thing, but we add that the first man, after he fell from his wholeness, underwent the corruption of his good nature and passed this on to all of his descendants."[285] The whole of Book Three of *Bondage and Liberation of the Will* is an interaction with Augustine; at one point he paraphrases an Augustinian argument with yet another reference to the distinction between the freedom created in man by nature, contrasted with his bondage by a corruption of that nature:

> Just as if someone should say, 'Man is a two-footed animal, therefore he can walk and go along,' it would be no bad or improper argument. But if someone wanted to transfer this to a paralytic, the reply is to hand that from another source there is a fault which impedes his nature. Concerning the will exactly the same kind of reply should be given: it is indeed free by nature, but by corruption has been made a slave, and it is held back by this bondage until it is set free by the hand of God.[286]

Similarly, and now quoting Augustine directly, '"So let man hear that the necessity of sinning derives from the corruption of nature, not from its creation…' … For if we can believe Augustine, wherever he praises the capacity

[284] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 77.
[285] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 84.
[286] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 97.

for free choice he is thinking of the original creation of our nature, not of its present wretchedness into which it has fallen headlong through a fault of choice."[287]

Calvin finds Augustine particularly important for supporting his understanding of the relationship between nature and grace. In Book 22 of *Against Faustus the Manichee*, which Calvin cites approvingly, Augustine argues that grace is not extrinsic to humanity in a way that would render it unintelligible, or that addresses itself to a capacity not found in human nature – grace restores, and does not destroy or replace, nature:

> 'Man is renewed through that possibility through which, if he had wished, he was able not to have fallen.' … 'I call it nature rather than grace [when writing] against the Manichees, because the issue with them was over nature. And in any case what grace does is to make the restored nature capable of what the corrupted nature cannot do' (*Retractations* 1.16) He acknowledges that he ascribed to nature what belongs only to grace, because of course the only purpose of grace is to restore the nature that has fallen and has been overturned and make it stand upright.[288]

Still following Augustine, Calvin refers again to the difference between the way that God works in a stone and the way that he works in a human being: the latter is created a rational animal, with a free will, and God's providence does not coerce or render null that free will but only works in accord with it as its Creator:

> [Pighius says] Augustine denies that grace is sufficient without free choice, as well as that free choice is sufficient without grace. I agree, but all that he means is that God is working in a human being, and not in a stone, since he has a will, born and prepared for willing, as they say. By

[287] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 98, citing Augustine, *Nature and Grace* 65.78-66.79 (NPNF 5:149).
[288] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 99. Here, Calvin also notes that Augustine speaks as he does about the freedom of the will in the context of a dispute with Manicheism, which would hold that nature itself is evil, and not against Pelagianism, which would hold that nature is capable of free choice even after the fall.

> bending it to the good, [God] makes good the will which by the corruption of nature is wicked and perverted. So it is just as if he said that a human being cannot will well unless he already has a will, and it is self-determined. Since he has the latter from nature and the former from grace, Augustine rightly says that without free choice there is no room for grace. … If you want this explained to you more clearly, think of it like this: the human will is like matter which has been subjected to the working of grace, so that it may receive its form from it.[289] So it follows that the will with its self-determined movement comes from nature, wickedness from the corruption of nature, [while] goodness results from the grace of the Holy Spirit and so is his own work.[290]

❖ Divine and Human Action

One of the primary charges that Pighius levied at Calvin was that his teaching made humanity totally passive with respect to redemption, obedience, and holiness before God. Pighius had argued that human responsibility for sin or righteousness is incompatible with Calvin's positions on God's sovereign providence and, in particular, with Calvin's holding that fallen humanity, dead in Adam, was necessarily bound to sin.[291] Pighius took particular issue with language from the 1539 edition of the *Institutes*, in which Calvin had written that "everything of ours is obliterated when we are regenerated by the Lord."[292]

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[289] Lane points out here the Aristotelian distinction between matter and form. Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 115n178. Calvin adverts to this distinction only twice, but Calvin often talks of the will being "formed" by grace. The other reference is at Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 226: "The will is as it were the matter, suited and able to receive form; before it is renewed, it is badly formed through natural depravity. But when it is renewed so as to acquire goodness by the Spirit of God, it as it were puts on another form."

[290] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 115. This would push against an allowance Tanner makes for Luther: "Take, for example, Martin Luther's concentration on God's gracious justification of the sinner in Christ as his choice for the central topic of theology. If God's own agency as the justifier of the sinner is under consideration, there are no created causes for this… The creature's capacities must be said to have no efficacy in this regard; talk about them is pointless unless it is to make clear their inadequacy." Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 111-112. Tanner extends this comment to refer more generally to reformed soteriologies that emphasize the impotence of the sinner, even as saved. Tanner is correct to speak of creaturely capacities' lack of *efficacy* for salvation, but this does not make talk of them pointless because it is in salvation that they are restored to what they were made to be, and because it is the created capacities of creatures that place the fallen creature in potency to the saving acts of God.

[291] Lane, introduction to *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, xxi.

[292] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 212, referring to 1539 *Institutes* II.iii.6. Lane notes that this is language that Calvin changed between the 1539 and 1559 editions of the *Institutes*, clarifying

Pighius had interpreted this to mean that Calvin was saying that regeneration requires the destruction of every part of ourselves, body and soul, and in particular the substance of our will, before all could be replaced. Lane opines that while Calvin felt that Pighius had willfully misunderstood what he wrote in the 1539 *Institutes* in levying this charge, his teaching in *Bondage and Liberation of the Will* and, subsequently, in the 1559 *Institutes* "is so much fuller and clearer than the 1539 *Institutio* that Calvin must bear at least part of the blame for Pighius' misunderstanding."[293] Nevertheless, even in 1539 Calvin had qualified his teaching, noting his agreement with Augustine that grace does not destroy the will, but restores it.

Calvin built on this qualification in his reply to Pighius' charge that he made humanity passive in salvation. Once again, he claimed the authority of Augustine, whom he cited as writing something similar: "Let no one flatter himself. For of himself he is nothing but Satan. For what do you have of your own but sin? Take away this sin, which is yours. For you have no righteousness except by God's gift."[294] In a similar vein, Calvin explains, he understands "whatever is ours" to mean "what we have in ourselves apart from God's creation."[295] And this is not our nature as created, nor any part of us; it is "the corruption which abides not in some part of us but throughout our nature."[296] The key, Calvin explains, is to be able to "distinguish between the original

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significantly what had been open to the interpretation that conversion involves the destruction of the will and its replacement by God. Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers*, 187-188.
[293] Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers*, 187.
[294] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 212."A loose quotation, with some paraphrase," notes Lane, from Augustine's *Sermons on John* 49.8 (on 11:8-10) (NPNF 7:273).
[295] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 212. Lane notes that the shift in the language from the 1539 to the 1559 *Institutes* included a similar qualification. BLW 212, n57.
[296] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 212-213.

creation of our nature and the corruption of it which later supervened as a result of sin."[297]

This comes out most clearly in the exegesis of Ezekiel 36 that Calvin provides in *Bondage and Liberation of the Will* in response to the criticisms of Pighius that Calvin's doctrines tended to a human passivity in salvation.[298] As Billings writes, "[Calvin's] post- Augustinian anthropology seems to emphasize the powerlessness of the human to move toward the good *telos* of creation."[299] In response, Calvin turned to the metaphor in Ezekiel 36 of the "heart of stone" replaced by a "heart of flesh." A heart of stone, hostile to the Creator, is not proper to human nature, but is only found in deficient, fallen humanity, and it is this which can do nothing of itself. Calvin distinguishes between "the original creation of our nature and the corruption of it which later supervened as a result of sin."[300] Calvin characterizes the latter as accidental to the soul, a privation of God's good creation rather than substantively essential to humanity. Before the Fall, Adam is 'united and bound' to his Creator.[301] The "death" of all that is in us apart from God is thus the death of the sinful desires which are improper to human nature.[302] "Moreover, participation in Christ's death is always followed by a participation in Christ's resurrection, which involves a fulfilment of the original *telos* of creation, the good 'substance' of human nature."[303]

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[297] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 213.
[298] Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers*, 187-188.
[299] J. Todd Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift : The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 43.
[300] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 213.
[301] Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift*, 46, fn. 96, citing *Institutes* II.i.5.
[302] Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift*, 47, fn. 97, citing *Institutes* III.iii.5-9.
[303] Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift*, 47, citing *Institutes* III.iii.9.

❖ Substance and Accident

Here Calvin is drawing on perhaps the most important concept that he inherits from Aristotle: the distinction between substance and accident.[304] The *substance* of any thing is all that makes it what it is, in its essence, such that if you took any part of its substance away it would no longer be what it is. As a human being, I am a rational animal, finite, mortal, and so on. Take any of these away and I would no longer be a human being. The *accidents* of a thing are those qualities of a thing which are *not* essential. That I am finite is essential to me being human; that I am under six feet tall is not. Crucial to Calvin's use of the substance/accident distinction is that a thing can be corrupted without changing in its essential nature, because the corruption is only an accident, not part of the substance of the thing. In his discussion of the fallen human nature and its redemption (particularly in *Bondage and Liberation of the Will* but throughout the *Institutes*[305] as well), he repeatedly puts to use the Aristotelian distinction between substance and accident. What is changed by sin, and rehabilitated in redemption, is a "habit" of the will, not its substance.[306]

Calvin does not believe that there is any disagreement between himself and Luther on the distinction between the substance of the will and its accidents, including corruption. He writes that "…both Luther and all of us define nature

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[304] Lane, intro to *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, xxv. As Lane writes, "The use of the Aristotelian distinction is fundamental to Calvin's argument. It is, one might say, not merely accidental to it but part of its substance." Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers*, 183. Calvin, while not quite as given to puns, seems to agree: "Without this distinction it is not surprising if [Pighius] gets everything confused." Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 186.
[305] *Institutes* II.i, for example.
[306] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 377-79, 381, 392; cf. Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers*, 184.

in two ways: first as it was established by God, which we declare to have been pure and perfect, and second as, corrupted through man's fall, it lost its perfection."[307] He refers back to his own words from the 1539 *Institutes*, words which Pighius had referred to as well, in which he claimed that the corruption is due to sin, not to creation:

> …our fallenness is to be attributed to the corruption of our nature, lest an accusation be levelled against God, the creator of our nature. It is indeed true that that deadly wound persists in our nature, but it is of great importance whether it befell it due to some external cause or was innate from its beginning. It is agreed, however, that it was caused by sin, and so there is no reason for us to complain, except about our own selves…[308]

Calvin makes these arguments in the course of a section of *Bondage and Liberation of the Will* in which he is defending against Pighius' comparison of the reformers to the ancient heresy of Manicheism. The charge was that Calvin had so strongly stated the need for God's spirit to destroy and remove the evil will that he was effectively making human nature itself evil, as created, and thus in need of replacement by a new creation. Calvin places himself alongside Augustine in the latter's original arguments with the Manichees themselves. Augustine's argument had been that the Manichees implied that human nature could not be healed because it is substantially corrupt; "it could not be healed if the evil were eternal and unchangeable," but would have to be entirely gotten rid of for a fresh start.[309]

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[307] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 40; cf. *Institutes* I.xv.1 and II.i.1. For Luther, see *Bondage of the Will*, 81, as well as his sermon given at the Leipzig Disputation with John Eck, June 27-July 14, 1519, cited in McSorley, *Luther: Right or Wrong?* 246n146.
[308] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 47, citing *Institutes* II.i.10.
[309] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 48.

"Those who say that evil is accidental to our nature," as Calvin himself claims, "are greatly opposed to the Manichees, who assign it to its substance."[310]

Calvin puts the substance/accident distinction to use in order to argue that Pighius is reading into his language of "removal" a false dichotomy: "[Pighius] concludes that it would be impossible for our will and reason to be removed from us unless the substance of the rational soul itself were also removed, and a new, different soul entered in its place. But I would like to know from him whether he does not allow that those powers of the soul can have accidental qualities."[311] More to the point, "[Pighius] concludes then that man lost no part of his natural endowment, but only that he had been deprived of the supernatural gifts which God had granted to him. But he loses touch with reality in not being able to distinguish wholeness, which is the true, authentic state of our nature, from a contingent corruption."[312]

In Calvin's view, it is God who is both creator and healer of human nature as created and re-created, and it is in this divine activity alone that we can find the source and end of what human nature is and can be. Just as God cannot be blamed for the corruption that humanity brings on itself through sin, so humanity cannot by its sin do anything but corrupt what God has made – sin creates nothing substantial. "What similarity, I ask, is there between substance and accident? Between God's creation and corruption brought on himself by man?"[313] Sin does nothing but corrupt what God has made, affecting human

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[310] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 48.
[311] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 213.
[312] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 186. The last phrase is literally "accidental corruption." Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 186n100.
[313] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 47.

nature only in its accidents. Calvin speaks of regeneration as an "obliteration" of what we have in ourselves because he wants to affirm both that it results in nothing of the corruption remaining and that the corruption contributes nothing to its own healing;[314] at the same time, what is obliterated is only "what we have in ourselves," which is nothing other than that corruption.

It is this, Calvin claims, which frees him from the charge of passivity: the Spirit does not obliterate the human will and go on to act in its stead (as though Calvin had an "Apollinarian" anthropology), but rather restores the human will to its proper condition. As Billings notes, "In Pauline terms, one 'dies' to the 'flesh' in regeneration; thus, this is not the death of God's good creation, but rather vivification and restoration by the Spirit."[315] For Calvin, there is an active human participation in the righteousness of Christ – though it is imputed to us by faith, the work of the indwelling Spirit - which is not passive, but which cannot be said to derive from our *fallen* humanity in any way. It is the Spirit which replaces our hearts of stone with hearts of flesh. The will, thus healed and led by the Spirit, assents to knowledge of God and of the self, as known in Christ, which is faith. This assent, and the works which follow from faith, can properly said to be ours: though they cannot arise apart from the indwelling Spirit uniting us to Christ, they are proper to the heart of flesh, oriented in love to the Father, which is itself proper to created humanity.[316] Faith is, moreover, the principle of our sanctification, by which we do good works which may, again, properly be called

[314] "Now, since repentance is a spiritual resurrection from the dead, I say that it is no more within man's power than it would be to create himself – indeed less, insofar as it is a more excellent thing to make oneself righteous than it would be to make oneself a man." Calvin goes on to provide exposition from 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians to this effect. Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 214-215.
[315] Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift*, 45.
[316] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 120.

ours. Calvin refers to Augustine's claim that the will to believe, formed in us by the Holy Spirit, can simultaneously be called ours and yet be attributed to God, granted to us out of his sheer generosity.[317] The Christian will is not coerced by the Spirit,[318] but leads the believer to perform acts of Christian love by means of their own faculties, restored to freedom to act in accord with their proper end by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Again referring to Augustine, Calvin argues that "God draws us… without force and not unwillingly, and therefore as those who follow of their own accord – but with a will which he has made."[319]

There is a dynamic of reciprocity – "consequent-but-simultaneous," as Schindler put it[320] – at work here. The Spirit must restore in us a heart of flesh, and so faith cannot derive from the heart of stone which precedes it: nevertheless, the reception of faith and the acts which flow from it in sanctification are the very condition of the gift of this heart. Calvin is mostly focused on salvation and so he mostly defines freedom as opposite to coercion.[321] However, he displays a

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317 Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 119.

318 Billings writes that "Calvin denies that God would 'coerce anyone by violence'. Instead, 'so that he may have willing [*voluntarios*] servants who follow of their own accord and obey, he creates a new heart in them and renews a right spirit in their inner nature'." Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gfit*, 49, fn. 106, citing Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 193-194, 232.

319 Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 232.

320 David L.Schindler, *Ordering Love*: *Liberal Societies and the Memory of God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011), 296, referring to the virgin birth as a clear instance of asymmetric but reciprocal gift. Schindler also states, "Of course, in another and still more basic sense, Jesus Christ, the child of God, the "first-born of creatures" (Col. 1:15), is the one in whom being-as-gift is first and most properly revealed. And yet, in the 'economic' order, since the 'permission' (free *fiat*) of a woman is the anterior condition for the incarnation of the Son of God, her nuptiality takes a certain precedence even over Christ's filiality in this order." Schindler, *Ordering Love*, 296, fn. 8. See also Milbank, "Can a Gift Be Given?" 136: "God first of all gives the gift of a man making a complete return to God, which is what we as sinners refuse. And yet the reception of this gift by the church begins *before* the gift is given, and is even a condition of its being given: Mary's *fiat* speaks the *logos* into being. *And yet* this is all given by grace."

321 Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice*, 189.

willingness to engage with and appropriate Aristotelian and Thomistic concepts where they serve his purposes.

❖ Primary and Secondary Causality

Calvin was accused by Pighius and others of holding a view of God's sovereignty that implied that divine action overwhelms and displaces all that is human. There is an additional assumption underlying the charge. Not only, Calvin argued, did Pighius fail to see that he distinguished between the substance of our will (which the Spirit restores) and the accident of the corruption of our will (which the Spirit wipes away). He was also implicitly charging that Calvin assumed that divine and human action are in competition with one another, inhabiting the same ontological sphere. Calvin did not allow this assumption: he was explicit that God's sovereign action to regenerate the human will could not be characterized as an extrinsic action *upon* something, as though the human will had to be set aside, replaced, or made anything other than what it was in order to conform to the ends to which God has sovereignly ordained it. He referred to the "crazy and ungodly illusion of those who imagine that God works in a human being as he does in a stone, that is, without (so to speak) an inward movement of his will."[322] The problem with this illusion is not that it overstates God's sovereignty, but that it does not accord God *enough* power over his creation, which is just as he has ordained it to be, including its freedom for responsible action.[323] Although Calvin

[322] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 118.
[323] Thomas writes that "the perfection of the effect demonstrates the perfection of the cause, for a greater power brings about a more perfect effect. But God is the most perfect agent. Therefore, things created by him obtain perfection from him. So, to detract from the perfection of creatures is to detract from the perfection of divine power. But, if no creature has any active role in the production of any effect, much is detracted from the perfection of the creature. Indeed, it is part of the fullness of perfection to be able to communicate to another being the

rejects the stoic notion of *fortuna*, he nonetheless acknowledges that some things are "fortuitous by nature," even as "God's providence exercise[s] authority over fortune in directing [their ends]."[324] Even "concerning inanimate objects," Calvin wrote, "we ought to hold that each one by nature has been endowed with its own property, yet it does not exercise its own power except in so far as it is directed by God's ever-present hand."[325] Even here, speaking of what he refers to as "nothing but instruments to which God continually imparts as much effectiveness as he wills, and according to his own purpose bends and turns them to either one action or another,"[326] Calvin holds that the object exercises *its own* power, and not merely the power of God working through it.

The power to "incline to faith or turn to unbelief"[327] is something that God is truly able to grant to his creation. Calvin quotes Augustine on this power and on the will to believe: "'Each of them is ours, but it is said to be of God and of Christ for the reason that it is through his generosity that it is granted to us.'"[328] It is God that gives the power to turn to faith and the will to believe, but that power and that will truly belong to the creature to which they are given. "God draws us, Augustine says, without force and not unwillingly – but with a will which he has made. Hence I disagree with Chrysostom not when he says that those who are drawn are ready of themselves to follow, but [only] because he

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perfection which one possesses. Therefore, this position detracts from the divine power." SCG III.69.15, cited in John Webster, "'Love is Also a Lover of Life': *Creatio Ex Nihilo* and Creaturely Goodness," in *God Without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology, Vol. 1* (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 112. Tanner specifies that "[t]he theologian should talk of created efficacy as immediately and entirely grounded in the creative agency of God." Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 91.

[324] *Institutes* I.xvi.9. This text is present in the 1539 edition.

[325] *Institutes* I.xvi.2.

[326] *Institutes* I.xvi.2.

[327] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 119.

[328] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 119, quoting Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 9.15.

assumes that they must follow in a movement that is all their own."[329] Compare this to Aquinas, who writes that "to be moved voluntarily is to be moved of one's own accord, i.e. from a resource within. That inner resource, however, may derive from some other, outward source. In this sense, there is no contradiction between being moved of one's own accord and being moved by another."[330] On this passage, Webster comments that if "we are to see that Aquinas's argument is evangelically well-judged, we need to grasp that divine providential acts are not simple compulsion (the archer sending the arrow) but rather intrinsic to the creature whom God moves, what Aquinas calls 'natural necessity,'[331] in which the creature is activated and not diminished."[332]

The divine action to give and the creaturely action to exercise that will both exert causal power over the same effect – namely, faith and the works that follow. Calvin takes Pighius to task for separating these two, as though each had to be kept free from interfering with the other. Pighius, Calvin explains, reads Ezekiel 36 as referring to two separate events: the metaphorical description of hearts of stone being replaced by hearts of flesh refers to God's prevenient grace, while the actual acts of obedience refer to his justifying grace. But in Calvin's view, the

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[329] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 232. Richard Muller writes, "When Calvin comments on the divine causality in human acts, he is quite consistent in his assumption that God in no way causes human agents to act contrary to their natures or to will contrary to their own inclinations. [*Institutes* I.xviii.2, *Commentary on Isaiah* 10:15] When he comments on the inclusion of the fall in the eternal decree, he insists that God wills the fall in such a way as to include Adam's free choice. [*Institutes* III.xxiii.8] Calvin affirms secondary causes and their contingent operation as well as arguing genuine human agency and responsibility. [*Institutes* I.xvi.8, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*] He specifically countered Stoic fatalism. [*Institutes* I.xvi.8] And Calvin also borrowed from Bernard of Clairvaux's paradigm for understanding liberty, indicating that freedom from sin and freedom from misery had been lost in the fall, but that freedom from necessity was the permanent property of human beings. [*Institutes* I.ii.5]" Richard Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice,* 187.

[330] ST Ia.105.4 ad 2.

[331] ST Ia.103.1 ad 3.

[332] John Webster, "On the Theology of Providence," in *God Without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology, Vol. 1* (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 139.

prophet has simply employed metaphorical language and plain speech to amplify his characterization of the same single work of regeneration.[333] And Calvin is clear that that work does not consist of the replacement of the heart or will, but the restoration of the faculty of the will by which it wills *well* and not badly.[334] The change that takes place pertains to a power or habit of the will, not to its substance.

> To be brief: I say that the will is evil not by nature (that is, by God's creation) but by the corruption of nature, and that it cannot be otherwise until it is changed to be good by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Nor do I imagine that a new product or a new creature is made in such a way that with the destruction of the former substance a new one takes its place. For I explicitly mention that the will remains in man just as it was originally implanted in him, and so the change takes place in the habit, not in the substance.[335]

Calvin's capacity to hold a strong view of God's sovereign providence while, at the same time, maintaining human responsibility and freedom derived from his holding in tension the same balance between primary and secondary causality that one finds in his patristic sources and in Thomas. Calvin, like most of his contemporaries, embraced the distinction between primary and secondary causality, and saw no conflict between God's sovereignty as primary cause and the liberty of secondary causes (as it would come to be expressed in the Westminster Confession[336]). To say that God is primary cause, for Thomas, is not to say that he is first in a temporal sequence or the most powerful of all

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[333] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 195.
[334] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 209.
[335] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 210, and cf. Lane's introduction to *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, xxvi: "Calvin… [insists] that he had never taught the destruction or removal of the substance of the heart or will. What is changed in conversion is not the faculty or substance of willing, nor merely the actions of the will. It is rather, something in between, the quality or "habit" (Latin, *habitus*) of the will."
[336] WCF V.2.

efficient causes; either of these options, indeed, would demolish the distinction between primary and secondary causes by setting them alongside one another on the same ontological playing field. Calvin's understanding of primary and secondary causality appropriately guards against the Stoic flattening of causality into "a perpetual concatenation and intricate series of causes, contained in nature," which would reduce all causality to efficient causality and would deny that God can act as "arbiter and governor of all things" without doing violence to creaturely freedom.[337]

Rather, God as primary cause gives existence to all secondary causes, and indeed to the full order of causation in which they interact in regular and (usually) predictable ways. This is how he can be sovereign over secondary causes without doing violence to their freedom or even preventing them from acting in a contingent manner: if there is a contingent secondary cause, it is so only because God gives existence to what it is in its essence, including contingency, when applicable.[338] "Therefore the Christian heart," he wrote, "since it has been thoroughly persuaded that all things happen by God's plan, and that nothing

[337] See the nearly identical language in *Institutes* I.xvi.8. and Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 38, and cf. Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice*, 189-190.

[338] Williams observes a significant point of convergence between Aquinas and Calvin on the understanding of how infinite and finite relate. An infinite effect cannot appear *in* a finite world; Aquinas' answer to this is that "infinite power appears in the created universe *in the bare fact of the universe's being created*, not in some process of introducing the infinite into the finite." ST IIIa.1.3. Calvin takes a similar line in arguing that Adam could have been perfect in his humanity without any *natural* fusion to the incarnate Christ, though not without a *relation* of mediation by the eternal Son of God – relation, not fusion, is how finite and infinite relate. *Institutes* II.12.2-3. "…[B]oth theologians recognize the risk of subverting the integrity of finite reality by speculating that it would need a certain kind of fusion with the infinite in order to be itself." Williams, *Christ: The Heart of Creation*, 144.

takes place by chance, will ever look to him as the principal cause of things, yet will give attention to the secondary causes in their proper place."[339]

For Calvin, this implies a deeper, even doubled, sense of gratitude for the gifts of this life: "Meanwhile, nevertheless, a godly man will not overlook the secondary causes. … In short, for benefits received he will reverence and praise the Lord as their principal author, but will honor men as his ministers; and will know what is in fact true: it is by God's will that he is beholden to those through whose hand God willed to be beneficent." He goes on to say that with regard to future matters, the godly will not hesitate to avail himself of whatever human means he might put to use "as lawful instruments of divine providence", all the while drawing assurance from God's providence, such that "his confidence will not so rely upon outward supports as to repose with assurance in them if they are present, or, if they are lacking, to tremble as if left destitute."[340]

All of the above reflection on primary and secondary causation was in place in the 1539 *Institutes*. But Calvin's debate with Pighius, dependent on his interaction with the church fathers, sharpened his views on the matter, leading him in *Bondage and Liberation of the Will* to a position consistent with that of Aquinas. "You see there that God causes everything and of necessity, that is, in accordance with his providence. Why is it that the earth waits for the hand of the farmer when its fertility depends entirely on nothing but the blessing of God? Evidently because God has ordained it so."[341] If we are fed by God's word alone, Calvin asks, why do we eat? Calvin argues that in fact, bread has no power *of itself*, but

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[339] *Institutes* I.xvii.6. This text is present in the 1539 edition.
[340] *Institutes* I.xvii.9. This text is present in the 1539 edition.
[341] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 32. Compare to ST Ia.105.5.

only God's blessing, so that if we eat without his blessing we are not nourished. But that doesn't imply that we are nourished without eating. In other words, the fact that secondary causes aren't efficacious on their own does not imply that there are no secondary causes.[342] Similarly, Calvin points out that the Proverbs encourage prudence and careful planning, which are efficacious but always subject to the decrees of God.[343]

❖ Necessity and Contingency

The 1559 *Institutes* make clear Calvin's approval of the distinction between the necessity of the consequence and the necessity of the consequent thing, which preserves space for contingency in the created order. Muller writes that a failure to see this distinction in Calvin "assimilates Calvin to the minority modern reading of Aristotle and to [a] problematic reading of Aquinas..."[344] Calvin writes that

> what God has determined must necessarily so take place, even though it is neither unconditionally, nor of its own peculiar nature, necessary. A familiar example presents itself in the bones of Christ. When he took upon himself a body like our own, no sane man will deny that his bones were fragile; yet it was impossible to break them [John 19:33, 36]. Whence again we see that distinctions concerning relative necessity and absolute necessity, likewise of consequent and consequence, were not recklessly invented in schools, when God subjected to fragility the bones of his Son, which he had exempted from being broken, and thus restricted to the necessity of his own plan what could have happened naturally.[345]

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[342] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 32-33.
[343] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 36; cf. Proverbs 16.
[344] Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice,* 187.
[345] *Institutes* I.xvi.9. This text appears only in 1559. Battles notes that this view, rejected by Luther in *The Bondage of the Will*, finds agreement from Aquinas ("[S]ince the goodness of God is perfect, and can exist without other things inasmuch as no perfection can accrue to Him from them, it follows that His willing things apart from Himself is not absolutely necessary. Yet it can be

Likewise, in the 1559 text Calvin rejects any notion of God's absolute power that would divorce it from his justice.[346]

In *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther rejected the distinctions between both relative and absolute necessity and between the necessity of the consequence and necessity of the consequent;[347] Calvin affirmed both not only in *Bondage and Liberation of the Will* but also in *The Eternal Predestination of God* and in the 1559 *Institutes* I.xvi.9.[348] Calvin agreed with the medieval tradition stretching back through Aquinas to Aristotle that the distinction preserved crucial space for the creation of contingency, and for things to fall out from contingent causes that were not merely illusory.

In *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, Calvin discusses Aristotle's understanding of "necessity" extensively, in order to cite Aristotle in support of his position.[349] " In Aristotle," he writes, "the existence of alternative possibilities is always the opposite of necessity."[350] This refers to the simultaneity of potencies, not potency of simultaneity. In other words, this refers to the way in which we can say of Socrates, when he is sitting, that he is not sitting of necessity because it is always possible that he could begin to run – despite the fact that he cannot be

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necessary by supposition, for supposing that He wills a thing, then He is unable not to will it, as His will cannot change." - ST Ia.19.3), Bonaventura, Duns Scotus, Erasmus, and Eck.

346 *Institutes* I.xvii.2.

347 Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, 82

348 Lane, introduction to *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, xxviii. Interestingly, Lane notes both that Calvin intended to put distance between himself and Luther on the understanding of absolute necessity, even as he defended Luther to Pighius and sought to explain why there were differences between the reformers, even a progression of thought in the early years of the reformation. Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers*, 181, and cf. Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 28-29. Muller, on the other hand, fails to find evidence that Calvin ever posed the distinction between *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata* in a systematic way. Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice*, 276-279.

349 Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers*, 183, and Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 149.

350 Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 149.

running and sitting at the same time. Muller writes that "Calvin does not raise the issue of the retention of the momentarily unactualizable potency to the opposite in the instant of the act itself, but he clearly recognizes that human beings have potencies to more than one effect, and he recognizes, also, that as contingent, such effects stand as necessities of the consequence."[351] At the same time, Calvin's understanding of God's freedom implied that God's decree was never subject to absolute or natural necessity, so that providence could clearly be distinguished from the stoic concept of fate.[352]

More importantly, "Calvin indicates that it would be quite 'absurd' to claim that there was no contingency in the world: on the one hand, what God ordains necessarily occurs – but the things that God has ordained 'are not necessary in their own nature [*suapte natura*].' Although the 'order of nature' is 'ordained [*positum*]' by God, this ordination does not exclude contingency – indeed, God works through means so that his 'certain providence' is conjoined with contingencies: providence does not bind the hands of human beings."[353] Calvin likewise does not understand causality only in terms of efficient causality: "we do not, with the Stoics, imagine a necessity arising from a perpetual concatenation and intricate series of causes, contained in nature: but we make God the arbiter and governor of all things."[354]

"Calvin's approach, in other words, did have general affinities with understandings of divine and human causality found in the medieval tradition,

[351] Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice*, 190.
[352] *Institutes* I.xvi.8-9; cf. Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice*, 188.
[353] Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice*, 191.
[354] *Institutes* I.xvi.8.

specifically in his balance of a divine primary causality with a human secondary causality and in his adoption of the distinction between necessity of the consequence and necessity of the consequent thing."[355] Muller cites Paul Helm in agreement: Calvin has no problem positing two sets of necessary and sufficient causal conditions for some event, without this diminishing the sovereign efficaciousness of the divine willing *or* the causal powers with which God endows, and in which he upholds, his creatures.

❖ Bondage and Coercion

It is interesting that the context of Calvin's most extensive interaction with Aristotle, the church fathers, and the metaphysical questions that form the backbone of Thomas' understanding of both creation and providence should come in the context of a debate regarding the bondage of the will. That bondage – for both Calvin and Pighius – was not merely a question of whether humanity as a creature, subject to the providence of God (on these two points all would certainly agree), can be said to be free or not. The question pertains, rather, to *fallen* humanity; the primary bondage in question is not bondage to God's sovereign providence but bondage to sin. Some remarks on how Calvin divides this issue and answers these questions are in order and will draw to our close our examination of his appropriation of what is essentially a Thomistic understanding of providence, while at the same time elucidating some of the remaining tensions that do exist between Calvin and Aquinas on questions of soteriology.

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[355] Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice*, 192, referring to *On the Eternal Predestination of God* and *Institutes* I.xvi.9.

A key observation at this stage is that for Calvin, the liberty of secondary causes are fully operative in both fallen, unregenerate, humanity and in the regenerate. Muller writes that "Calvin's approach… did have general affinities with understandings of divine and human causality found in the medieval tradition, specifically in his balance of a divine primary causality with a human secondary causality and in his adoption of the distinction between necessity of the consequence and necessity of the consequent thing."[356] Calvin observes that Pighius' definition of free will involves the will being autonomous, "without doubt in the sense of doing whatever it does in such a way that it does not do it of necessity, but is able not to do it."[357] And if this sort of freedom is being opposed to coercion, then Calvin has no argument; he does not believe that the will – unfallen, fallen, or regenerate – is coerced to do what it does not want to do. But, Calvin notes, freedom v. coercion is not what people typically have in mind when they think of free will, and neither is it what scripture tends to focus on. What is typically in view, and what scripture speaks of, is a will which is in bondage, not one which is coerced; it is a will that does not have "both good and evil within its power, so that it can by its own strength choose either one of them."[358] Calvin agrees that the will is free in the sense of being self-determined, but holds that it is in bondage:

> There can be no such thing as a coerced will, since the two ideas are contradictory. … We say that it is self-determined when of itself it directs itself in the direction in which it is led, when it is not taken by force or dragged unwillingly. A bound will… is one which because of its corruptness is held captive under the authority of evil desires, so that it

[356] Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice*, 192.
[357] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 67. Note here that the language draws in the distinction between the necessity of the consequence and the consequent; "freedom" is being posited as having a simultaneous potency to alternatives – the capacity not to do what one does.
[358] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 68.

> can choose nothing but evil, even if it does so of its own accord and gladly, without being driven by any external impulse.[359]

A bound will, in other words, is free to do what it desires, but it cannot desire the good.[360] Calvin cites Augustine in support of this view: "Man, he says, has a will that is free, but to do evil. Why? Because it is moved by enjoyment and his own appetite. He adds later: 'But this will which is free in the wicked, because they enjoy evil, is not free to do good, because it has not been liberated.'"[361] And on the other side, regenerating grace, Calvin argues, is more than prevenient; it is efficacious, because it frees the will to desire the good. Calvin cites Augustine repeatedly in support of this point: "It is indeed certain that it is we who will when we will, but it is he who causes us to will the good. It is indeed certain that it is we who act when we act, but it is he who, by providing the will with full effective powers, causes us to act, as he says: I will cause you to walk in my commandments."[362] But he is also interacting approvingly with the metaphysical tradition from which Aquinas drew, citing Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* on cases in which the will becomes impotent to the good to make his point, and commenting that

> We see here a pagan philosopher acknowledge that it is not always in man's power to be good, indeed that he can be nothing

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[359] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 69. Cf. also Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice*, 188-189, arguing that because Calvin sees freedom opposed to bondage rather than coercion in scripture, he is comfortable with the notion that humans may simultaneously exercise truly voluntary choice while at the same time being necessarily determined to evil.

[360] Muller notes that there are certainly some deterministic leanings in *Institutes* II.iv.7. But again, the subject matter here is restricting to discussions of sin, grace, and salvation, and to whether the will is free to choose good or evil, not to mundane questions of freedom in daily activities or civil matters. Muller points out that in this, Calvin was not unlike his more philosophically and theologically sophisticated successors, such as Peter Martyr Vergmigli. Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice,* 189, and see also Lane, "Did Calvin Believe in Free Will?" 74.

[361] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 103, citing *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians* 1.3.7. (NPNF 5:379).

[362] *Grace and Free Choice* 16.32 (NPNF 5:457) which quotes Ezekiel 36:27, cited by Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 123; cf. also Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 132.

> but evil, and yet he is what he is willfully, and not by force, because at the beginning the free decision by which he gave himself over to obedience and bondage to his desires was within his own power. But surely it is the native philosophy of Christians that our first ancestor corrupted not only himself but all his offspring at the same time, and that it is from this that we derive the habit which resides in our nature. Now then, if you join this teaching about our faulty beginning to Aristotle's philosophy, you will with no trouble understand how sin, which is not in our power to avoid, is nonetheless voluntary.[363]

The doctrine of providence espoused by Calvin, then, like that of Aquinas, is consistent with the doctrine of creation – alongside of *creatio ex nihilo* we can find a doctrine of providence understood as *creatio continua*. God is no "momentary creator," Calvin writes: "unless we pass on to his providence… we do not yet properly grasp what it means to say: 'God is Creator.'"[364] In creation, God gives existence to what is not God, an order of causation that is free because he has willed it to be so. As creation is giving existence to something out of nothing, regeneration gives life out of death, a heart of flesh out of a heart of stone. Calvin cites Augustine to this effect: "The human will takes the initiative in doing evil, but in doing good it is the will of the Creator which takes the initiative, whether in making that which did not exist before or in remaking that which had fallen."[365] God's providential ordering of grace does not extrinsically impose a new will on the human heart in way that displaces or destroys the *substance* of the fallen will; it removes the accidental corruption of sin and restores the will to what it was meant to be. And this is possible because, as thoroughgoing as the corruption and as total as the bondage visited by sin may

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[363] Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 149-150. Note the distinction Calvin makes between accident and substance, here referring to "the *habit* which resides in our *nature*" (my emphasis).
[364] *Institutes* I.xvi.1.
[365] Augustine, *City of God* 13.15 (NPNF 2.251), cited by Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 104-105.

be, it cannot efface the image of God in mankind or create a new substance with a new end; fallen man is made for God, is in potency to God, the natural end of humanity that is "out of all proportion" to human nature.[366]

John Owen's Reformed Thomism

Calvin was by no means the last of the reformed to evidence an appreciation for the church fathers that drew him into frequent congruence with Thomistic categories and doctrines. One of the best examples was the reformed orthodox theologian and churchman John Owen (1616-1683).

❖ Reformed Orthodoxy and Scholasticism

Reformed Orthodoxy, writes Carl Trueman, finds creedal expression in the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dordt, the Savoy Declaration, and the Westminster Standards, and traces back to figures including Huldrych Zwingli, Johannes Oecolampadius, Martin Bucer, John Calvin, Heinrich Bullinger, Peter Martyr Vermigli, and Pierre Viret.[367] To be more specific, Richard Muller has divided the post-reformation period into four periods: a time of basic formulation (1523-1563, from Zwingli's *Articles* to the Heidelberg Catechism); Early Orthodoxy (1563-1640); High Orthodoxy (1640-

[366] *De veritate* q.14 a.2 *resp*.
[367] Carl Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 6.

1700); and Late Orthodoxy (1700-1790).[368] Owen himself is situated within the third of these periods, High Orthodoxy.[369]

For much of the twentieth century, scholarship on reformed orthodoxy in the period following Calvin was dominated by the theme of "Calvin against the Calvinists,"[370] which pitted Calvin against trends toward Aristotelianism, Thomism, and "scholasticism." More recently, Richard Muller has led a reassessment of the period which finds far greater continuity of both form and content across reformed theologians beginning with Calvin and his contemporaries, and extending across the succeeding centuries. In the early period during Calvin's life and immediately following, for instance, Muller points to Zwingli[371], Vermigli,[372] Zanchi,[373] and Keckermann[374] as examples of reformed theologians who made heavy use of Thomas in both their method and

368 Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 6-7, following Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Refromed Dogmatics*, 4 vols., 2nd Edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 2006), henceforth PRRD.
369 Carl Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1998), 13.
370 Christopher Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 10-11; the phrase originated in an article by that name, Basil Hall, "Calvin against the Calvinists," in Gervase Duffield, ed., *John Calvin* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1966), 19-37.
371 Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 12; Gottfried Wilhelm Locher, *Zwingli's Thought: New Perspectives* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1981).
372 Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 13; John Patrick Donnelly, *Calvinism and Scholasticism in Vermigli's Doctrine of Man and Grace*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought, vol. 18 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1976).
373 Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 12-14; Otto Gründler, *Thomism and Calvinism in the Theology of Girolamo Zanchi (1516-1590),* ThD Dissertation (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1961); Otto Gründler, "The Influence of Thomas Aquinas upon the Theology of Girolamo Zanchi," in J.R. Sommerfeldt, ed., *Studies in Medieval Culture* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Western Michigan University Press, 1964), 102-117; Harm Goris, "Thomism in Zanchi's Doctrine of God," in W.J. van Asselt and E. Dekker, eds., *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2001), 121-139.
374 Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 15; Muller, PRRD, vol. 1, 64-65.

theological doctrines,[375] often specifically to counter Roman Catholic positions, along with Arminanism and Socinianism.[376]

The Reformed Orthodox found much common ground with Thomas in terms of method: scholasticism is better characterized as a form of disputation rather than a specific set of doctrines or metaphysical positions.[377] Owen's affinity for the Aristotelian structures he found in Thomas, writes Trueman, does not drive his theological conclusions so much as shape the linguistic and heuristic devices by which he pursues them.[378] In this, Owen was following the common method of his day, deployed by Protestants and Catholics alike; in light of this, Muller describes the notion that Reformed Orthodoxy departed from Calvin in being overly rationalistic as a caricature:[379] scholastic methods were the available vocabulary for those who continued the debates initiated by the early reformers.

Turning to doctrine, on the other hand, Owen appropriates Thomistic teachings (along with other medieval positions and formulations tracing back to patristic sources) specifically in polemics against Roman Catholic teachings including the

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375 Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 15; Muller, PRRD, vol. 1, 64-65

376 Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 6-7.

377 Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 14.

378 Kelly Kapic, *Communion with God: The Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), 30, citing Trueman, *The Claims of Truth,* 11, 38, 233-240. Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 9 cites Van Asselt and Dekker: "The difference with the term 'scholasticism' lies especially in the fact that orthodoxy refers to the proper content of theology, while scholasticism indicates a form of scientific practice…" Van Asselt and Dekker, *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 13. Trueman notes that "Richard Muller has noted three basic characteristics in Reformed Orthodox discussion of the Trinity in polemical context: a careful appropriation and deployment of patristic vocabulary; a vigorous struggle over the exegetical ground of the doctrine; and the struggle to find a set of philosophical categories for the expression of the doctrine, given the increasingly problematic conception of substance in the seventeenth century." Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 47. Cleveland, for his part, notes four categories of Thomistic influence in Owen: (a) direct quotation, (b) use of a Thomist theological concept, (c) use of similar but not identical principles, and (d) mere coincidence of thought due to a common source. Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 3.

379 Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 8.

doctrine of God, the Trinity, the nature of theological language and logic, and anti-Pelagian positions on grace, freedom, and predestination.[380] To Owen, Thomistic categories were an aid against the assertion of human autonomy he found in Arminianism and Socinianism, strands of thought that the Reformed Orthodox tended to address together,[381] against which they often found themselves making common cause with Catholics when it came to questions of the doctrine of God such as divine necessity, knowledge, and simplicity.[382] He wrote, for instance, that "All the acts of the will being positive entities, were it not previously moved by God himself, 'in whom we live, move, and have our being,' must needs have their essence and existence solely from the will itself; which is thereby made αυτο ον, a first and supreme cause, endued with an underived being."[383] The metaphysical argument here closely recalls Thomas' Five Ways, "each of which famously ends with a self-caused cause, an αυτο ον, which Thomas declares by common consent to be called a god."[384]

For Owen this was not merely a matter of proper metaphysics; it was a matter of salvation. This comes through clearly in his *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, a primary text written against Arminian and Socinian views, particularly the writings of the

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[380] Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 22. Owen particularly relies on Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas in these veins; Aquinas is explicitly cited in his earliest extant work, *A Display of Arminianism* in his understanding of divine knowledge and providence, the simplicity of God, and metaphysical causality.
[381] Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 26
[382] Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 59.
[383] John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, Vol. 10 (Edinburgh & London: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850-1855), 120. Goold's edition comprises 24 volumes. Vols. 1-16 were reprinted in Edinburgh by Banner of Truth Trust, 1965. The Banner edition combined Goold's Vols. 16-17 in a single Vol. 16; Vols. 18-24 (*The Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*) were then also reprinted by Banner in 1991 in seven volumes, each volume being one number behind the Goold edition (e.g. Banner Vol. 17 = Goold Vol. 18, and so on). Hereafter, Owen, *Works* will refer to the numbering of the original Goold edition.
[384] Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 28-29, citing ST Ia.2.3.

Socinian John Biddle. It ends with a satirical catechism that draws the immediate *pastoral* implications of deviating from a classical understanding of divine necessity and knowledge, from predestination and sovereignty:

> Q. What peace and comfort can I have in committing myself to his providence, if he knows not what will befall me tomorrow?
>
> A. What is that to me? See you to that.[385]

Owen's affinity for Thomas and the church fathers was unsurprising given his education at Oxford, particularly under the tutelage of Thomas Barlow. Carl Trueman, reviewing the reading list Barlow assigned to his students during Owen's student days, notes an emphasis not only on Thomas, but on the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Old and New Testaments, the Septuagint, the Vulgate, lexical and linguistic aids, plus various commentaries, books on the canon, church and Jewish history, books on the apocrypha, and non-canonical early church writings.[386] This education would have been typical of the Reformed Orthodox, for whom scripture had final and unique authority, but who also took tradition and church history very seriously.[387]

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[385] Owen, *Works,* 12, 588.

[386] Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 9, and see also Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 18-20. Augustine appears more than any other single author. BB Warfield wrote that the Reformation was in part a struggle over Augustine: "[T]he Reformation, inwardly considered, was just the ultimate triumph of Augustine's doctrine of grace over Augustine's doctrine of the church." BB Warfield, *Studies in Tertullian and Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), 130.. Oxford education at that time also saw the rise of increasing comfort citing classical authors and relying on sources from the pagan past as a source of wisdom (but also, precisely because these texts were being treated as sources of wisdom, a certain ahistorical approach to texts). Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 15

[387] Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 11. Trueman notes two basic principles in the theology of Reformed Orthodoxy. "Ontically speaking, the Reformed are clear that it is God himself who is the author of theology… Noetically speaking, the Reformed are agreed that it is scripture that is the cognitive ground of theology. … [S]cripture is now the norming norm of all theological statements; revelation in nature or in the Incarnation is only comprehensible when grasped through the teaching of scripture…" See also Muller, PRRD, vol. 3 on this.

Protestantism has at times been characterized as an outgrowth of Scotism, over against Thomism, but in the case of Owen and many of the Reformed Orthodox, all of the major doctrines remain consistent with the catholic tradition tracing back through Thomism to the church fathers, while affinities for Scotist teaching manifest largely in secondary doctrinal areas. As John Patrick Donnelly notes in his study of Thomism in the early reformers Peter Martyr Vermigli and Griolamo Zanchi, "when Protestants came to recast their theology into a scholastic form, they rather consistently avoided nominalism as a base. Insofar as the roots of Protestant scholasticism go back to the Middle Ages, they tend to go back to the *via antiqua* and Thomism. Protestant fruit grows quite well on the Thomist tree, even better than on the… nominalist tree."[388]

It is true that Owen's Reformed Orthodox contemporaries, such as William Twisse, were influenced by a voluntarist strand of Scotism with regard to their understanding of divine necessity,[389] but as Trueman has pointed out, to characterize them as Scotist for this reason is to focus on a relatively minor aspect of their theology, and ignore the vastly more important areas of disagreement between the Reformed Orthodox and Scotus such as the former's rejection of univocity of being and adoption of Thomas' understanding of the real distinction between being and essence.[390]

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[388] John Patrick Donnelly, "Calvinist Thomism," *Viator* 7 (1976), 454, cited by Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 16

[389] Antonie Vos has argued "for a strong Scotist dimension to Reformed thought, particularly as this manifests itself in a commitment to what he has called *synchronic contingency*, a way of construing the relation between God and creation which allows for divine sovereignty and yet avoids both the Scylla of determinism and the Charybdis of the human autonomy." Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 57, citing Antonie Vos, "De kern van de klassieke gereformeerde Theologie," *Kerk en Theologie* 47 (1996), 106-25.

[390] Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 16-17, Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 24, Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 154n6.

John Owen provides an example of an even more thoroughgoing Thomism in a prominent theologian of High Reformed Orthodoxy, maintaining classical views in his doctrine of God and breaking with the voluntarist tendencies of contemporaries like Twisse. Major areas of Thomist influence on Owen, that we will discuss briefly below, include his doctrine of God (including divine simplicity, divine necessity, and divine knowledge), and a notion of infused habits of grace (albeit one restricted to sanctification, not justification).[391] Trueman's characterization of Owen's theology as "a modified and eclectic Thomism" is apt.[392]

❖ Divine Simplicity and Divine Causality

The doctrine of divine simplicity was central to Owen's doctrine of God. In this, he did not differ from most of his Reformed Orthodox contemporaries; simplicity was largely accepted by all, and on terms adopted from medieval theology with little debate.[393] Like Thomas, the Reformed considered linguistic

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[391] Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 4, 23. Owen also draws quite explicitly on Thomas in his understanding of the hypostatic union, opposing the notion that Christ's human nature should be understood as an "accident" of the divine. Compare Owen, *Works,* 1, 230 and ST IIIa.2.6.resp., and see Timothy Baylor, "One With Him in Spirit: Mystical Union and the Humanity of Christ in the Theology of John Owen", *'In Christ' in Paul: Explorations in Paul's Theology of Union and Participation*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament II, ed. Kevin Vanhoozer, et al (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 427-452.

[392] Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 24. Sebastian Rehnmann, likewise, has given a more nuanced appraisal, writing that Owen proceeds "according to a Scotistically modified Thomism," and noting the Thomist influence of his Oxford tutor, William Barlow. Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 58, citing Sebastian Rehnmann, *Divine Discourse: The Theological Methodology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2002), 62-64, 181. On Rehnmann, see also Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 2 and Kapic, *Communion with God*, 29, reviewing Rehnman, *Divine Discourse*, 25-46; and Sebastian Rehnman, "John Owen: A Reformed Scholastic at Oxford," in van Asselt and Dekker, *Reformation and Scholasticism,* 181-203.

[393] Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 38; Kapic, *Communion with God*, 168: Owen and his contemporary Reformed scholastics take divine simplicity for granted. Muller, PRRD, vol. 3, 39; see also Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. G.T. Thomson (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1950), 59, 57-104, although Kapic criticizes Heppe for presenting a monolithic Reformed approach to the relationship between divine simplicity and the distinct attributes of God.

distinction between God's attributes to be formal, not real, allowing finite, composite human beings to speak of God.[394] Owen characterizes it as a negative principle:

> [T]hough simplicity seems to be a positive term, or to denote something positively, yet indeed it is a pure negation, and formally, immediately, and properly, denies multiplication, composition, and the like. And though this only it immediately denotes, yet there is a most eminent perfection of the nature of God thereby signified to us; which is negatively proposed, because it is in the use of things that are proper to us, in which case we can only conceive what is not to be ascribed to God.[395]

Owen treats the theme of divine causality as closely related to simplicity in a similar manner, directly citing Thomas in doing so. Just as God is not composed of matter and form, so likewise he is not composed of potency and act, but is sheer actuality.[396] This, Owen writes, is once again a negative principle: "Those who affirm God to be a simple act do only deny him to be compounded of divers principles, and assert him to be always actually in being, existence, and intent operation."[397] Owen references Thomas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* Ia.14 on this point.[398] His dependence on Thomas is evident throughout his defense of divine simplicity and its relationship to divine causality, particularly in his first published work *A Display of Arminianism* (published when he was 26 years old), and in his refutation of the Socinian John Biddle in *Vindiciae Evengelicae*.[399] He

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394 Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 39.
395 Owen, *Works,* 12, 71. Similarly, Owen describes God's omnipresence (which he terms his immensity) as a negative attribute, denying that there is any place that God is not rather than positively stating that he fills or exceeds all of space: God is said to be immense "not by a diffusion of his substance… but by an inconceivable indistancy of essence to all things…" Owen, *Works*, 12, 93, cited by Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 41.
396 ST Ia.3.2.
397 Owen, *Works*, 12, 71.
398 Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 54.
399 Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 33.

also frequently cites Dominican Thomists who followed Thomas himself, such as Diego Alvarez.[400]

❖ Owen and Divine Necessity

Owen's views on divine necessity, and specifically the necessity of the incarnation, underwent a shift during his career after his early *The Death of Death* (1647). Owen came to a position at which he "seems to have considered [Twisse and Rutherford's] essentially Scotist grounding of the necessity of incarnation and atonement purely on the will of God as providing an inadequate basis for maintaining an orthodox Christology and soteriology in the face of Socinian critiques."[401] In later works he argues "that retributive justice is an essential part of God and that, once God decided to forgive sin, the incarnation and death of Christ became necessary, not just convenient…"[402]

A key distinction, following from the doctrine of divine simplicity, is made between properties of God which are absolute and those which are relative to his creation. Retributive justice is the latter; it has reference only to God's relation to his creation and can therefore be considered necessary with respect to that creation, while remaining free in an absolute sense for the creator.[403] Owen's argumentation as he works through this position evidences Thomistic influences. There must be, he argues, close connections between the nature of God and the

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[400] Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 44.
[401] Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 42
[402] Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 23; see Owen, *Works,* 10, 481-624. For further analysis of Owen's differences with the Socinians and with his reformed contemporaries Twisse and Rutherford on this issue, see Carl R. Trueman, "John Owen's *Dissertation on Divine Justice*: An Exercise in Christocentric Scholasticism," *Calvin Theological Journal* 33 (1998): 87-103.
[403] Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 44.

nature of the world.[404] He raises two key issues: can finite humans know how God must act? And, how can human language about attributes (like "justice") refer to the perfectly simple Triune God? He draws heavily on Thomistic categories of language worked out in ST Ia.9 in working through these questions, as well as how to understand talk of the emotion and repentance of God.[405]

❖ Owen and Divine Knowledge

Necessity and contingency with respect to God as primary cause is closely related to the question of divine knowledge, another doctrinal locus in which Owen showed a close affinity for Thomistic concepts. "God knows all things," he wrote, "(i) by knowledge of his decree; (ii) in their immediate causes (iii) in their own nature as future, but to God's infinite knowledge always present."[406] As Thomas had noted,[407] the immediate causes of a thing can be contingent by God's decree, even as the decree itself is immutable with respect to God in his simplicity and immutability. "Thus," Owen went on, "it may be said that the same thing is contingent and determined, without the least appearance of contradiction, because it is not spoken with respect to the same things or causes."[408] Here Owen is making use of the distinction between the necessity of consequence and the necessity of the consequent in Thomistic, rather than Scotist, terms.[409] But as Trueman notes, Owen's reason for taking this position

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[404] Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 43
[405] Owen, *Works,* 12, 112-114, 119-120, cited by Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 36.
[406] Owen, *Works,* 10, 28.
[407] ST Ia.23.4.
[408] Owen, *Works*, 12, 130.
[409] Richard Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice: Freedom, Contingency, and Necessity in Early Modern Reformed Thought* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2017), 317ff.; and Richard Muller, "Not Scotist: Understandings of Being, Univocity, and Analogy in Early Modern Reformed Thought," *Reformation & Renaissance Review* 14/2 (2012), 125-148. Owen spends little time on

derived largely from reformed concerns regarding scripture and soteriology: "[T]he Reformed commitment to God's knowledge of future contingents is not exclusively, or even primarily, a metaphysical one. Rather, it is rooted in the statements of scripture, with the theologian then having the task of elaborating the necessary ontological framework and logical consequences of such statements."[410] The "truth value of future tense propositions" is not "an interesting logical conundrum," as it was for Aristotle; on the contrary, it's a problem raised by the pages of Scripture and is therefore an issue running back throughout the history of anti-Pelagian thought, through Scotus, Aquinas, Augustine, and all the way back to Paul. "If all events," writes Trueman, "are foreknown and foreordained by God, even if contingent in terms of their secondary causality, then predestination, whether election to glory or reprobation to damnation, must also come under that category."[411]

Trueman points out that even where Owen's espousal of divine simplicity bears direct resemblance to Thomas' "Five Ways," his primary interest in putting it to work is not to demonstrate that God exists, but to understand providence and the relationship between divine and human action.[412] Owen, like Thomas, draws a connection between the real distinction between essence and existence and the question of the liberty of the will. As God alone is simple, it is true of him alone that essence and existence are one; likewise, that his knowledge is identical with his essence, and so with his will. God alone has no external cause, because he is

middle knowledge – knowledge of conditionals or what is commonly known as Molinism. Twisse's is the most significant Reformed Orthodox entry to this debate. See PRRD 3, 417-420.

[410] Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 65

[411] Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 65

[412] Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*; Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 112.

not a composition of potency and actuality; there is in him no potency needing actualization, and so there need be no external cause moving him or underlying his will.

Owen quotes *Summa Theologiae* Ia.19.11 to argue that while there may be a linguistic distinction made between the secret and revealed will of God, in fact the will of God is simple and undivided, with the revealed will of God properly being the sign of God's will, called his will only in a metaphorical sense.[413] But the creature, composed of form and matter, essence and existence, must be moved from potency to act by some actuating cause, and this is true even of those contingent actions in which the creature's will is truly free:

> Everything that is independent of any else in operation is purely active, and so consequently a god; for nothing but a divine will can be a Pure Act, possessing such a liberty by virtue of its own essence. Every created will must have a liberty by participation, which includeth such an imperfect potentiality as cannot be brought into act without some premotion (as I may so say) of a superior agent. Neither doth this motion, being extrinsical, at all prejudice the true liberty of the will, which requireth, indeed, that the internal principle of operation be active and free, but not that that principle be not moved to that operation by an outward superior agent. Nothing in this sense can have an independent principle of operation which hath not an independent being. It is no more necessary to the nature of a free cause, from whence a free action must proceed, that it be the first beginning of it, than it is necessary to the nature of a cause that it be the first cause.[414]

Those things that God has willed to come about contingently are known by him in two different ways. He knows them in Himself as their first cause – in which

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[413] Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 37

[414] Owen, *Works,* 10, 119-120, quoted in Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 39. Likewise, writing of the free will that may be ascribed to any creature, fallen or not, he writes, "We grant man, in the substance of all his actions, as much power, liberty, and freedom as a mere created nature is capable of. We grant him to be free in his choice from all outward coaction or inward necessity, to work according to election and deliberation, spontaneously embracing what seemeth good to him." Owen, *Works,* 10, 116.

sense they can be said to be necessary because His knowledge of Himself and His willing of the contingent creature are all alike one and identical to His perfectly simple essence. But secondly, he knows them in their immediate causes, as He has created them, "wherein their contingency doth properly consist."[415] It is in this sense that Owen understands that God predetermines both necessary and free actions. In making these claims he is dependent on both Thomas and succeeding Thomist theologians from both the reformed and Dominican traditions.[416]

❖ Owen and Soteriology: Infused Grace and Imputed Righteousness

Owen's dependence on Aquinas and those who lie in his tradition are sufficient to designate him as a Thomist, but he remains a *reformed* Thomist. What marks him out as reformed and places him in disagreement with Thomas is largely his understanding of soteriology, and specifically the distinction he draws between justification and sanctification.

Like Calvin before him, Owen's primary concern in understanding the freedom of the will, predestination, the relationship between divine and human action, and the metaphysical framework orbiting the real distinction that lies beneath all of these topics is not metaphysics for its own sake. He is much more occupied with salvation. How can fallen man be saved? Dead in his trespasses, he is impotent as to his salvation save by the sovereign, regenerating, grace of the Holy Spirit,

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[415] Owen, *Works,* 10, 28, quoted in Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 38.
[416] He cites ST Ia.22.4.resp., ST Ia.83.3, ST Ia-IIae.112.3, and ST Ia.19.8.ad.3 on the topic, as well as the Reformed Thomist Zanchi and Alvarez. See Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 40-41, 64.

just as the creation is passive as to the union of essence and existence which it has by participation.[417] God brings life out of death, just as he creates out of nothing. Owen finds Thomas unhelpful on justification because of the role of human merit in Aquinas' scheme; locating any basis for justification in human merit would make no more sense to him than positing an autonomous ground outside of God himself for creation – which would reduce God to no god, because it would lay something alongside him as co-eternal and uncaused. Owen's understanding of sanctification, on the other hand, fits much more happily with Thomas' scheme. Here Owen is happy to talk about an infusion of God's grace, and about the virtues of the creature, just as he is happy in his metaphysics to follow Thomas in saying that God can sovereignly ordain freedom and contingency in his creation without doing violence to his own sovereignty or the liberty of the creature.[418]

The anthropological framework through which Owen works out the soteriological implications of the doctrine of God holds much in common with that employed by Thomas, as both trace their roots back to Aristotle.[419] Owen, as Kelly Kapic has noted, combines an Aristotelian faculty psychology with a biblical understanding of sin.[420] For Owen, the faculties of mind, will, and

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417 Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 68.

418 Owen's understanding of the perseverance of the saints is dependent on Aquinas as well; he references SCG III.155.2, where Aquinas notes that "for any variable and changing nature to remain fixed on one thing, it needs the aid of an immovable mover." He quotes ST Ia.109 to the same effect, as well as referring once again to the work of the later Dominican Alvarez. See Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*,, 48-50, 61.

419 Owen and many of his contemporaries employed Aristotle's language of *hexis* translated as *habitus*. Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 62, and see Owen, *Works*, 3, 5; 102; 220; 252, etc.; ST Ia-IIae.49-55; Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 323-234; Muller, PRRD, vol. 1, 259, 355-59.

420 Kapic, *Communion with God*, 36. This is not surprising: Muller notes that the Protestant scholastics adopted "without question the entire language of faculty psychology as one of the presuppositions of their discussions of human knowing." Muller, PRRD, vol. 1, 356. Kapic notes that faculty psychology also shapes Owen's Christology. Kapic, *Communion with God*, 93.

affection are all marred.[421] The mind, for instance, is misdirected by sin, and as no other faculty can savingly will, desire, apprehend, or adhere to the good without it being rightly discerned and presented to the soul by the mind,[422] this misdirection leaves fallen man impotent to his own salvation. These faculties, nevertheless, are not utterly destroyed but remain intact – and they are what make relation with God possible.[423]

Here, for instance, is Owen's conception of the will, in its essence and as restored: "First, as a rational, vital faculty of our souls; secondly, as a free principle, freedom being of its essence or nature. … Believers have free will unto that which is spiritually good; for they are freed from that bondage and slavery unto sin which they were under in the state of nature."[424] He goes on, "[a]s Aristotle says, 'Virtue is a habit which maketh him that hath it good or virtuous, and his actions good.' Now all moral habits are seated in the will. Intellectual habits are not immediate effective of good or evil, but as the will is influenced by them. These habits do incline, dispose, and enable the will to act according to their nature."[425]

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[421] This points to a place of disagreement with Aristotle on the affections, for the latter believes that the affections will follow the guidance of the reason, whereas Owen believes that fallen affections disrupt the mind and lead the will astray. For Aristotle, it is of the essence of the human that the reason is rational and the affections irrational, and order comes when the mind, which is uncorrupted, rules over the affections. For Owen, the mind and affections of man as created are both oriented toward God, but as a result of the fall that the affections lead away from God and the mind is confused; that is, the corruption affects all parts of the person. See Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 54.
[422] Kapic, *Communion with God*, 46ff
[423] Kapic, *Communion with God*, 41
[424] Owen, *Works*, 3, 334; 494, quoted by Kapic, *Communion with God*, 50
[425] Owen, *Works*, 3, 502-3

Owen sees the rehabilitation of these habits as dependent on the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit.[426] He notes that the Spirit, in regeneration, "offers no violence or compulsions unto the will. … If it be compelled, it is destroyed."[427] This notion that the faculties are redeemed and restored, not replaced, is critical to both Owen and Aquinas, both of whom affirm that sin distorts but cannot destroy human nature, nor create something different in its place, and that redemption depends on human nature's continued, fundamental orientation to God.[428]

Trueman argues that Owen not only agrees but depends on Aquinas for this point. Discussing Owen's Christology, he writes that his "argument is that human nature, albeit pure and undefiled as in Christ, is as yet on its own incapable of living supernaturally to God, an argument reminiscent of Thomistic understanding of human nature, and one which connects both to medieval notions of the *donum superadditum* and, by way of structural analogy, to the divine condescension in the original covenant of works."[429] Like Thomas, Owen

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[426] Owen, *Works,* 3, 244-82; 11, 94-95. The language of "habitual grace" appears also in Owen, *Works,* 2, 172; see Kapic, *Communion with God*, 63

[427] Owen, *Works*, 3, 319, quoted by Kapic, *Communion with God*, 50

[428] This framework, for instance, is evident in Aquinas' discussion of faith and reason in *De Veritate* Q. 14 and 15 (St. Thomas Aquinas, trans James V. McGlynn, S.J., *De Veritate* Questions 14 and 15 (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994)), which exhibits the same dynamic as his participatory metaphysic taken as a whole: faith and reason are related to one another as reciprocal gifts, asymmetrically originating in the gratuitous gift of God, such that the reciprocal response of human reason as it approaches the beatific vision is the very form of the gift of faith. The full reciprocal dynamic may be sketched out as follows: Divine grace forms faith, an infused habit of the mind which moves the will to prompt the understanding to give assent to the praiseworthiness of God, man's supernatural end and highest good. Having given this assent, the understanding leads reason in discursive inquiry into what is believed, by which the mind draws ever nearer the beatific vision. Discursive thought and the assent of belief are thus parallel, though only the former can be characterized as motion from potency to act. (*De Veritate* q.14 a.1 *resp.*) Belief is an aesthetic judgment in which the will attaches itself to one member of a contradictory proposition, as it assents to the praiseworthiness of some good. Discursive thought, on the other hand, moves from first principles to a resting point. The assent given by belief is not a motion to a resting point; rather, it orients the course of discursive inquiry toward the approved good. (*De Veritate* q.14 a.1 *resp.*)

[429] Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 94-95, citing Owen, *Works*, 3, 168-169.

believed that "Adam is designed for a supernatural end to which his natural endowments were not adequate."[430] And following Thomas, Owen argues that normal habits acquired by repeated action are insufficient for salvation; there must be an infused habit of grace, by which the believer receives a new nature, and this is solely a work of God's grace.[431] As Cleveland writes, "Owen's distinction between natural virtues and infused virtues is identical to the Thomistic distinction between virtues given by God for a divine end and natural moral virtues in order to emphasize the divine origin of this habit of grace." For Owen, he continues, "[s]anctification happens by the infused habit of grace, not by the acquisition of natural moral virtue."[432]

It's just here that Owen's disagreement with Thomas comes in: he is happy to apply the language of infused grace to sanctification and regeneration, but not to justification.[433] He specifically rejects Thomas and Thomas' dependence on Aristotle on this point:

> It is... to no purpose to handle the mysteries of the gospel as if… Thomas and Gabriel… were to be raked out of their graves to be our guides. Especially will they be of no use to us in this doctrine of justification. For whereas they pertinaciously adhered unto the philosophy of Aristotle, who knew nothing of any righteousness but what is a habit inherent in ourselves, and the acts of it, they wrested the whole doctrine of justification unto a compliance wherewithal.[434]

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[430] Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 70.
[431] Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 81. Compare ST Ia-IIae.51.4; Cleveland argues that Owen's discussion of virtue is a good example of him reflecting Thomistic concepts without directly citing Thomas. Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 105, 107-108.
[432] Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 115.
[433] Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 92.
[434] Owen, *Works,* 5, 12, cited by Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 117.

For Owen, the infused grace by which sanctification takes place is not the basis of the justification of sinners; they are made righteous only by the righteousness of Christ that is imputed to them:[435]

> That there is a habitual, infused habit of grace, which is the formal cause of our personal, inherent righteousness, [the reformed] grant: but they all deny that *God pardons our sins, and justifies our persons*, with respect unto this righteousness, as the *formal cause* thereof; nay, they deny that in the justification of a sinner there either is, or can be, any inherent formal cause of it. And what they mean by a formal cause in our justification, is only that which gives the denomination unto the subject, as the imputation of the righteousness of Christ does to a person that he is justified.[436]

Owen saw one source of the disagreement between himself and Thomas – and Rome – as emanating from the difference in how they conceived of faith. For Owen, faith is the instrument by which Christ's righteousness is received, and the object of faith is Christ.[437] Owen believed that Rome made faith a mere "assent unto divine revelation"; Thomas likewise describes faith as a matter of assent to propositions, its object being the "First Truth".[438] Owen, by contrast, characterized faith as including also a receiving of and submission to the revealer and the one revealed.

Owen faulted Roman theologians for conflating justification and sanctification: for speaking of an entirely gracious gift of the Holy Spirit as constituting merely a

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[435] Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 5-6, Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 51. This distinction between justification and sanctification – that the former involves imputed righteousness while the latter is a matter of infused grace – is standard in reformed theology; see Westminster Larger Catechism Q77.
[436] Owen, *Works,* 5, 63-64, cited by Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 117. Owen turned to the fathers for support of his view of the imputed righteousness of Christ, appealing to Leo, Augustine, Irenaeus, Origen, Cyprian, Eusebius, and Anselm. Owen, *Works,* 5, 176-177, cited by Kapic, *Communion with God*, 140.
[437] Owen, *Works,* 5, 80-81; cf Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 115-117.
[438] ST IIa-IIae.1.1; for Thomas on faith, see ST IIa-IIae.1-5.

first, preparatory, justification, by which original sin is extinguished and sinful habits expelled, but which must be followed by a second justification, grounded in the works of the believer as its formal cause.[439] But for Owen this is more than a semantic difference: the problem is not simply that he is calling "sanctification" what Rome calls an aspect of justification. Owen believes that Rome's view distorts the teachings of scripture that while it is theoretically possible for one to be justified by one's good works, in actual fact no one is justified by the law, and good works are the fruit, not the cause, of justification.[440]

For Owen, as a reformed theologian, justification and sanctification are distinct and of distinct quality, but they are inseparable, and salvation would be incomplete without either. Sinners cannot be declared righteous before God on the basis of any inherent virtue or habitual act – only the imputed righteousness of Christ will suffice. But on the other hand, Owen does not believe that God merely declares a sinner to be righteous and then leaves her unchanged;[441] sanctification necessarily follows, and this is not by imputation, but by the infused regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit. The fruit of sanctification must follow justification, and imputation is not simply "the transmission or transfusion of the righteousness of another into them that are to be justified, that they should become perfectly and inherently righteous thereby; for it is impossible that the righteousness of one should be transfused into another, to become his subjectively and inherently."[442] The work of the Holy Spirit is not only

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[439] Kapic, *Communion with God*, 128; Owen notes with appreciation the fact that in Trent's discussion of the first of these two justifications, that by grace, the language of "merit" is avoided. Owen, *Works,* 5, 151.
[440] Owen, *Works,* 5, 138.
[441] Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 138
[442] Owen, *Works,* 5, 173.

regeneration, but an essential and ongoing change of disposition that reorients all the person's faculties to God.[443] Sanctification affects all parts of the person, "by the work of the Holy Spirit, 'whereby the mind is effectually renewed, the heart changed, the affections sanctified, all actually and effectually, or no deliverance will be wrought, obtained, or ensue, out of the estate' in which the unregenerate man finds himself."[444] This language pertains to sanctification alone; restricting our attention to sanctification only, Owen and Thomas are well aligned.

[443] Owen distinguishes between the utter lack of order in fallen man, which he calls "confusion" and individual sinful acts of "rebellion" on the part of the regenerate. Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 60-61.
[444] Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 64, citing Owen, *Works,* 3, 315.

Chapter 3: Jonathan Edwards on Creation, Metaphysics, and Modernity

Creation and the Desire of the Creator

Why did God create the world? According to Jonathan Edwards, he did so motivated by desire and delight in his own glory. When Edwards wrote his treatise "Concerning the End for Which God Created the World," he was responding to the objection that in depicting God's motivation in this way, he risked violating classical theism by making God's glory, and thus God himself, dependent on his creation, and posited a God who acted to satisfy desire for something that he was lacking without creation. How, Edwards was asked, can desire be appropriate in any sense to a God who is wholly sufficient in and of himself, dependent for his perfection on nothing outside of himself? Edwards' treatise defends classical theism against this objection - but in so doing, it raises a different set of problems, effectively denying that creation constitutes an order of causation distinct from the creator. In this chapter, we will first look at Edwards' understanding of the ends for which God created the world, centered around his desire for his own glory, and for that glory to be shared, known, and loved by creatures other than himself. We pay particular attention to the means - theological and philosophical - by which Edwards overcomes the objection that depicting God as being motivated to create by a desire for his own glory makes him dependent on his creation and is inconsistent with his being perfectly and eternally happy in himself. We then consider the claim, made by some Edwards scholars, that Edwards' theological commitments *require* that he posit God as the sole causal agent, and the world as a mere expression of his agency. Rather, we

will argue he is led to this conclusion by his metaphysical framework - in particular, his mechanistic account of causality, which Edwards shared with his materialist contemporaries. We argue that the same theological commitments can be held together with an account of creation as a truly real, distinct order of causation by rejecting the metaphysical terms of this modern debate.

In this chapter I will examine three aspects of Edwards' doctrine of creation: divine aseity and other aspects of the doctrine of God, occasionalism, and panentheism. The main argument of this chapter is that although the way in which Jonathan Edwards defends aseity and other aspects of the classical doctrine of God leads him to espouse both panentheism and occasionalism, this is the result of the metaphysical framework in which he works, and not directly implied by his reformed commitment to doctrines such as divine sovereignty. I will also be arguing that despite Edwards professed defense of the classical doctrine of God (as reviewed earlier in this thesis), he implicitly espouses both univocity of being and an extrinsic account of divine causation that conflicts with divine simplicity. I will progress in two stages. First, I will provide a close reading and analysis of the pertinent texts in Edwards' oeuvre.[445] Second, I will

[445] The texts we will be examining are all found in the Yale letterpress edition of Jonathan Edwards' works, which is now complete and available in searchable form online at edwards.yale.edu, hosted by the Yale Jonathan Edwards Center. The abbreviated citations I use below follow the numbering of the texts used in the Yale edition, which is the same online and in printed form; e.g. citations to vol. 1 of Edwards' works, *Freedom of the Will*, are abbreviated as YE1, followed by a page number. The main texts we will examine here are:

- *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 1, Freedom of the Will*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1957), hereafter YE1;
- *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 3, Original Sin*, ed. Clyde A. Holbrook (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1970), hereafter YE3;
- *Of Being*, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 6, Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, ed. Wallace E. Anderson (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1980), hereafter YE6;
- *Of Atoms*, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 6, Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, ed. Wallace E. Anderson (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1980), hereafter YE6;

examine how his doctrinal commitments and his metaphysical assumptions interact, focusing in particular on his univocal understanding of being, his account of divine and human causality, and the role of creaturely participation in the divine in his theology. I will argue that Edwards' reformed theology can be expressed without panentheism and occasionalism under a different set of underlying metaphysical foundations.

Divine Freedom and Aseity (*The Freedom of the Will* and *The End of Creation*)

❖ Divine Freedom

Our consideration of Edwards' understanding of divine aseity will focus on two texts in particular – *The Freedom of the Will*, which is primarily about human freedom but discusses God's freedom and independence from his creation at some length, and his dissertation on *The End for Which God Created the World.* Edwards' philosophical exploration of freedom begins with the well-known principle of sufficient reason,[446] sometimes described as a variant on the axiom

- *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 8, Ethical Writings*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), hereafter YE8;
- *The Nature of True Virtue,* in *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 8, Ethical Writings*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), hereafter YE8.

Edwards first wrote of his intention to write *Freedom of the Will* in 1747, and it was published in 1754. He composed the two dissertations found in vol. 8 of the Yale Edition in 1754-55, and they were posthumously published; he wrote *Original Sin* in 1756 and it was published in 1758. His biographer and the editor of an earlier edition of his works, Sereno Dwight (Sereno E. Dwight, *The Life of President Edwards*, in *The Works of President Edwards*, 10 vols. (New York, 1829), referred to the four works as "four of the ablest and most valuable works, which the Church of Christ has in its possession." The scientific and philosophical writings treated here (*Of Being* and *Of Atoms*) were written much earlier, in the 1720s, but the ideas contained there persist into his mature thought. For these and other bibliographic details, see Paul Ramsey's introduction to *Freedom of the Will*, YE1.

[446] Ramsey, introduction to *Freedom of the Will*, YE1, 34.

that *ex nihilo, nihil fit* ("from nothing, nothing comes") but better understood as stating that any change from potency to act requires a cause. Edwards will not allow that there exists any effect that has no cause. As Paul Ramsey writes in his introduction to the volume, "For Edwards as a theologian the issue is a simple one: either contingency and the liberty of self-determination must be run out of this world, or God will be shut out. 'If there be no absurdity or difficulty in supposing one thing to start out of nonexistence, into being, of itself without a cause; then there is no absurdity or difficulty in supposing the same of millions of millions.'"[447] Crisp writes that, "It was a central goal of *The Freedom of the Will* to show that the concept of an uncaused volition… was not merely false but incoherent."[448] Much of the treatise pursues this goal with respect to the freedom of created agents, but Edwards sees an incoherence no less in the idea that *God's* freedom could be such that his volition is entirely undetermined.[449] To understand this, it is best to examine briefly the ways he treats what it is to be *determined*, and to be *free*, in *The Freedom of the Will*.

Edwards defines the will as "that by which the mind chooses anything. The faculty of the will is that faculty or power or principle of mind by which it is capable of choosing: an act of the will is the same as an act of choosing or choice."[450] Edwards follows Locke very closely in being careful to point out that it is technically improper to speak of the *will* choosing one action over the other, as if the will itself had a will: rather, it is the agent who chooses, and the will is

[447] Ramsey, introduction to *Freedom of the Will*, YE1, 9, citing YE1, p. 183.
[448] Oliver Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards on God and Creation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 64.
[449] As we will see below, this is immediately problematic, failing to observe that because God is pure act in whom there is no potency, the principle of sufficient reason does not require that anything in God be caused.
[450] YE1, 137.

the faculty by which the agent does so.[451] For both Edwards and Locke the question is not the freedom of the will but of the agent; both hold that the agent is free when action follows the will.[452] But against Locke, he argues that there is no real distinction between "willing," "preferring," and "desiring."[453]

Edwards next defines what it means to say that the will is "determined": "the will is said to be determined, when, in consequence of some action, or influence, its choice is directed to, and fixed upon a particular object."[454] To speak this way indicates an effect, which – by the principle of sufficient reason - must have a cause.[455] That cause, Edwards claims, is the strongest motive that moves the mind.[456] Again, it is technically improper to speak of the will *itself* being free or determined; rather, Edwards is arguing that the *action* is determined *by* the will. For this reason Edwards would rather say "that the will always *is* as the greatest

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[451] Ramsey, introduction to *Freedom of the Will*, YE1, 47-48.
[452] Both Locke and Edwards are resistant to the tripartite division of the human into mind, will, and appetite. These are distinct *powers* but cannot be spoken of as though they were distinct *agents* with the person. Ramsey, introduction to *Freedom of the Will*, YE1, 48-49.
[453] YE1, 138-140.
[454] YE1, 141.
[455] Ramsey's introduction to *The Freedom of the Will* surveys Edwards' relation to contemporaries including Hume, Newton, and Leibniz. He writes that "Edwards' understanding of 'causation' has some similarity, on one side, with that of David Hume and, on the other, it has even more agreement with Leibniz' principle of sufficient reason. 'Beyond the constant *conjunction* of similar objects, and the consequent inference from one to the other, we have no notion of any necessity or connection,' Hume had written six years before Edwards. … For Hume conjunction was constant only in experience up to the present, while Edwards was sure of it for the future because the connection was a part of God's great system in which whatever is has sufficient reason. Their views are alike in rejecting the older notions of efficient causation in favor of cause as conjunction; although, with Leibniz, Edwards believes causation to be the ground or reason inherent in the world, because of the principle of sufficient reason in acts of will in God." Ramsey, introduction to *Freedom of the Will*, YE1, 34-35. As Ramsey points out, Edwards affirms Hume and Newton to his own purposes. He is happy to say that there is no natural causation, only constant connection/conjunction, without this leading to Humean skepticism because the will of God ensures the regularity of the natural order. And theologically, he doesn't want to say that anything else plays a role in such regularity, as though natural causation could exert a constraint on God. Cf. Ramsey, introduction to *Freedom of the Will*, YE1, 35-36. We will see these positions developed much more fully when we examine Edwards' metaphysics, particularly his occasionalism and panentheism, below.
[456] YE1, 141.

apparent good, or as what appears most agreeable, is, than to say that the will is *determined* by the greatest apparent good, or by what seems most agreeable…"[457]

Edwards defines "freedom" or "liberty" as "power, opportunity, or advantage, that anyone has, to do as he pleases. Or in other words, his being free from hindrance or impediment in the way of doing, or conducting in any respect, as he wills."[458] Freedom can be hindered in two ways: by constraint (being compelled to do something against one's will) or by restraint (being hindered from doing something that one wills).[459] Edwards' primary opponents in the treatise are Arminians who further add that freedom requires that the will itself be undetermined, self-determined, or indifferent;[460] Edwards regards this notion as simply nonsensical, demanding that acts of volition follow from no cause whatsoever. For Edwards, every effect has a cause, and a free choice is simply one for which the cause lies internal to the will of the agent, rather than being determined by external constraint or restraint.[461]

Most of *The Freedom of the Will* is concerned with human freedom, but Edwards applies the same concepts to divine freedom and determination. Edwards is quite comfortable characterizing God as being determined – indeed, as being determined more completely than any created being, for he is fully determined to perfection while all creaturely reality falls short of perfection to one degree or another. This represents no constraint on God's freedom because God is

[457] YE1, 144. It should be noted that all of this is perfectly consistent with the way Thomas Aquinas speaks of the relationship between faith, will, and desire in motivating human action in *De veritate* q. 14.
[458] YE1, 163.
[459] YE1, 164.
[460] YE1, 164.
[461] YE1, 164.

entirely *self*-determined; necessitated only intrinsically, not in the least extrinsically. Here Edwards makes use of a distinction between *moral* necessity, which is driven internally by one's own properties, and *natural* necessity, which follows from external constraint. God, he writes, is in no way determined by natural necessity, but is *fully* determined by his own necessary moral perfection.[462] In *The Freedom of the Will*, he writes, ""Tis no disadvantage or dishonor to a being, necessarily to act in the most excellent and happy manner, from the necessary perfection of his own nature. … 'Tis not inconsistent with the absolute, and most perfect sovereignty of God."[463] That sovereignty, Edwards goes on to explain, consists in God's infinite power to do whatever he pleases, without any dependence on any other power, but "being in everything determined by his own counsel, having no other rule but his own wisdom,"[464] which in turn is "supreme, perfect, underived, self-sufficient, and independent…"[465] Edwards writes that "God's will is steadily and surely… [and] necessarily determined to *that which is* most *wise*. … For if the divine will was not necessarily determined to that which *in every case is wisest and best*, it must be subject to some degree of undersigned contingence; and so in the same degree liable to evil."[466] Edwards insists that God is not "carried hither and thither at random," which "would certainly argue a great degree of

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462 Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards on God and Creation*, 68. Ramsey, introduction to *Freedom of the Will*, YE1, 40: "Putting several of the foregoing statements together, we may conclude that for Edwards, natural necessity is *prior* to the will from *without* the will, superior to supposable opposite endeavor of the will, and does not at all consist in the will; while moral necessity is a connection *lying in* the will that also exists in some sense prior to the will and endeavor, and so is in some respect *superior*, though not superior to any supposable opposition from the will with which it consists."

463 YE1, 377-378.

464 YE1, 380.

465 YE 1, 380.

466 YE 1, 380, and see Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards on God and Creation*, 72. Edwards subsequently points out that "[i]t no more argues any dependence of God's will, that his supremely wise volition is necessary, than it argues a dependence of his being, that his existence is necessary." YE1, 381.

imperfection and meanness, infinitely unworthy of the deity."[467] Rather, God is perfectly determined by his supreme wisdom. Edwards rounds out his argument by pointing out that to be determined in this way is no dishonor, for we speak of God, and of Jesus Christ in his humanity, as being necessarily determined to the good – and yet this does not stop our praise.[468]

One might respond that this depicts God as facing an external choice with independently set terms. Edwards avoids the conclusion that God is so constrained by denying that any such choice is external to God at all. The existence of the creature and of all of creation's contingent paths cannot be presupposed; the terms of each choice made by God are themselves the creation of God, having their existence only in him, just as what motivates God to the act of creation itself is nothing more than an emanation of his own infinite fullness.[469] Unlike creatures, God is not excited to move by some object that he finds outside himself: the "exercises of his communicative disposition are absolutely *from within himself*, not finding any thing, or any object to excite them or draw them forth; but all that is good and worthy in the object, and the very *being* of the object, proceeding from the overflowing of his fullness."[470]

In much of this, Edwards and Thomas Aquinas are in agreement. Like Edwards, Aquinas agrees that God's will is the cause of all things,[471] and that it is immutable.[472] Aquinas would certainly approve of Edwards saying that God is

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[467] YE1, 380.
[468] YE1, 277-294. Calvin makes a similar point in John Calvin, trans. G.I. Davies, ed. A.N.S. Lane, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1996), 147-148.
[469] YE8, 435.
[470] YE8, 462. Note the similarity here to Luther's language in Heidelberg Disputation 28.
[471] ST Ia.19.4.
[472] ST Ia.19.7.

not dependent on or moved by anything outside himself, but in fact he goes further than this and says that no cause can be assigned to the divine will at all,[473] using an argument that flows directly from divine simplicity and pure act. "Now as God by one act understands all things in His essence, so by one act He wills all things in His goodness. Hence, as in God to understand the cause is not the cause of His understanding the effect, for He understands the effect in the cause, so, in Him, to will an end is not the cause of His willing the means, yet He wills the ordering of the means to the end."[474] Aquinas says two things here. First, he works from the standard claim that because God is simple and pure act, there is in him no motion or change from potency to act and therefore, no requirement that anything in him be caused according to the principle of sufficient reason. But second, he notes that although God's willing some end does not require him to will the means to that end, he nonetheless "wills the ordering of the means to the end." Where Edwards will end up saying that God causes all things immediately, then, Aquinas has a more robust doctrine of secondary causes.[475]

Aquinas argues two other things regarding the will of God worth noting here, for comparison to Edwards. First, that God does not will all things necessarily,[476]

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473 ST Ia.19.5.
474 ST Ia.19.5.resp.
475 This doctrine carries through to other reformed thinkers. Heppe notes in his *Reformed Dogmatics*, for instance, that "[an] element in providence is the free concurrence of God in the series and concatenation of second causes, in which connection providence is called *mediata et ordinata* though not *conditionata* (indirect and ordered without being conditioned). … God's 'concurrence' does not therefore do away with the activity of second causes; on the contrary it is actually posited and sustained by the 'concurrence.'" Herman Heppe, trans. G.T. Thomson, *Reformed Dogmatics: Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1950), 258.
476 ST Ia.19.3 – here, again, Aquinas is distinguishing between absolute necessity and necessity by supposition; nothing willed by God is absolutely necessary, but it is necessary *supposing he has willed it*, because his will is immutable.

nor impose necessity on what he wills.[477] Secondly, that God has free will, which simply follows from the fact that he does not will all things necessarily (and so must exercise freedom in willing such things).[478] Edwards affirms that God is free – indeed, most free – but for him this very freedom determines God to will the best things necessarily.

In sum, for Aquinas, simplicity and pure act imply that God's will is not any sort of effect that must be caused, even by himself, and the fact that he alone is necessary being preserves space for a true contingency in what he wills. For Edwards, God's will is free, but his infinite goodness determines his will necessarily to the good. This, however, presumes that God's will could be (and indeed, must be) caused, which appears to be a categorical error. That which is pure act involves no motion from potency to actuality, and so cannot be caused, whether necessarily or contingently, deterministically or arbitrarily. "Revelation," David Braine writes, "needs a concept of a being which is underivative, but whose underivativeness is not just *de facto* but intrinsic, arising from a difference in the way in which this being possesses existence, a difference capable of setting it apart from all creatures and rendering it incapable of having a cause: it has to exist 'of itself' without causing its own existence."[479] Edwards held that the

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[477] ST Ia.19.8. "Now God wills some things to be done necessarily, some contingently, to the right ordering of things, for the building up of the universe. Therefore to some effects He has attached necessary causes, that cannot fail; but to others defectible and contingent causes, from which arise contingent effects. Hence it is not because the proximate causes are contingent that the effects willed by God happen contingently, but because God prepared contingent causes for them, it being His will that they should happen contingently."

[478] "It is meaningful to say that the one pure act of *esse subsistens* could 'be' all alone… The contrast to *esse subsistens* is not differentiation, but nothing other at all. That there is, in fact, anything other than the one pure act of *esse subsistens* is due not to the necessity of being coupled or paired… but to the unnecessitated choice exercised by the creator." Robert Sokolowski, *Presence and Absence: A Philosophical Investigation of Language an Being* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1978), 179.

[479] David Braine, *The Reality of Time and the Existence of God: The Project of Proving God's Existence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 348.

notion that God's will could be without cause was nonsensical, but in fact, it simply follows from the classical doctrine that says that God is perfectly simple, pure act.

Crisp cites John Cooper, who argues that "Edwards lacks the robust ontological Creator-creature distinction of classical theism. For him, creatures are divine thoughts."[480] Crisp does not agree that Edwards' idealism dissolves the creator-creature distinction: "it was precisely because Edwards wished to uphold the distinction between God as the 'being of beings,' the perfect being above all others, that he ends up relegating creatures to some lesser ontological status as ideas sustained by the divine mind…"[481] He does hold, however, that Edwards' idealism introduces complexity into God. "God cannot be metaphysically simple as well as being the 'container' for the created order."[482] He does not propose a solution for this apparent inconsistency, claiming that "[t]his is a serious enough concern. But it is one Edwards shares in common with other Augustinian Neoplatonists,"[483] all of whom hold to both divine simplicity and to a doctrine of the divine ideas.

On the contrary, a recent monograph by Gregory Doolan shows how Aquinas reconciled these two ideas in his doctrine of divine ideas as exemplar causes.[484] "[I]n the divine mind," Thomas writes, "there are exemplar forms of all creatures, which are called ideas, as there are forms of artifacts in the mind of an artisan."[485]

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[480] Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards on God and Creation*, 160.
[481] Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards on God and Creation*, 160.
[482] Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards on God and Creation*, 160.
[483] Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards on God and Creation*, 163.
[484] Gregory T. Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008).
[485] *Quod.* 8, a. 2, cited by Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas*, 1.

Doolan's study is devoted to demonstrating and explicating in what sense these ideas are the *cause* of created things. He notes in particular that "the most general characteristic of an exemplar idea that Thomas presents is that it is a *form*. … Thus as an operative form it is that 'in regard to which' (*ad quam*) a thing is formed."[486]

For our purposes, the important question is not so much the nature of the divine ideas as exemplar causes, but how it is that ideas corresponding to all created things can exist in the mind of God without introducing irreducible complexity into the divine nature. Doolan acknowledges the problem, for while the divine ideas must exist in the mind of God,[487] the doctrine of divine simplicity holds that there is no composition in God, that all of his attributes are one. Obviously, not everything of which God is the cause is identical, so how can their exemplar ideas exist in the mind of God without implying complexity in the divine mind?[488] The crucial point is that an idea signifies not a distinct thing within the divine nature (which would indeed imply complexity in God), but rather a distinct way in which a created thing is related to the divine essence.[489] "Idea," Doolan writes, "refers to God's essence as *imitable*, which it is in multiple ways."[490] As John Wippel explains, "The notion that a divine idea expresses God's understanding of his essence as imitable is crucial, just as is the point that the divine essence is imitated in different ways by different creatures, and therefore bears a different

[486] Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas*, 25, citing *In I Sent.,* d. 36, q. 2, a. 1, and *De veritate*, q. 3, a. 1. Doolan also draws attention to Thomas' account of divine ideas as exemplar causes in *ST* Ia.15 and *ST* Ia.44.
[487] Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas*, 81.
[488] Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas*, 78.
[489] Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas*, 91-92.
[490] Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas*, 86.

relationship to each."[491] Expressing this relationship between the simplicity of the divine nature and the multiplicity of created things, Doolan writes that "[b]y means of the one intelligible species that is the divine essence, and by means of the one understood intention that is the divine Word, God understand many things."[492] Divine ideas, then, pertain not to many distinct things that inform God's understanding, but to the ways in which God understands his own essence as it is imitable by creatures. Because God's essence can be known in multiple (indeed, infinite) ways, it is imitable in multiple ways, and so God can have ideas of diverse created entities without doing violence to the simplicity of his own essence.[493] The divine ideas are distinct from the divine attributes; diversity exists not in God's essence, but in the order of God's understanding.[494]

Contrary, then, to Crisp's claim that the diversity of the divine ideas introduces an unresolved inconsistency not only into Edwards' doctrine of creation, but to the thought of all Augustinian Neoplatonists (among whom Thomas could be counted), Thomas appears to have given an account of how ideas in the mind of God, as exemplars, can serve as the *formal* causes – that "with regards to which" – of all things without implying complexity in God's essence itself.

❖ Divine Aseity

So much for divine freedom. What about divine aseity, the doctrine which states that God is entirely self-sufficient and replete within himself, in no way

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[491] John F. Wippel, *Thomas Aquinas on the Divine Ideas*: The Etienne Gilson Series, no. 16 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1993), 9, cited by Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas*, 86.
[492] Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas*, 95.
[493] Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas*, 100-103 summarizes how Aquinas lays out the mature form of this argument in *ST* Ia.15 and *ST* Ia.44.
[494] Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas*, 105, citing *Quod.* 4, q. 1, a. 1, *sed contra* and reply.

dependent on his creation? We now turn to the first of two dissertations that Edwards wrote, intending them to be read together – "Concerning the End for which God Created the World",[495] and "The Nature of True Virtue."[496] Crisp concludes his analysis of "The End of Creation" by affirming that "it is clear that Edwards is able to uphold divine metaphysical aseity."[497] However, he warns that "he does seem at times to end up with a rather diminished account of the creation in order to protect his exalted understanding of the divine nature and sovereignty over all that is created."[498] We will see below what he is talking about: Edwards espouses a doctrine of creation which is both panentheistic and occasionalist, in which God is finally the only true being, the only true actor, and all of God's action commonly called providence or governance is collapsed into a single act of *creatio continua* understood as a constant act of origination rather than preservation or governance.[499] Crisp argues that "the route by which [Edwards] avoids compromising divine… aseity **requires** him to deny that the creation is an end in itself."[500] But is he right – does Edwards' commitment to divine sovereignty and other aspects of the classical doctrine of God (common to patristic, catholic, and reformed theologians throughout the history of the

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[495] Found in YE8.

[496] Likewise found in YE8. As Holmes points out, it is more important to read "True Virtue" with the background of "The End of Creation" in mind than vice versa, although neither can be read independently of the other. Holmes, 45. We will focus primarily on "The End of Creation" in pursuing Edwards' understanding of divine aseity, but will make reference to "True Virtue" in dealing with some of the objections Edwards raises to his arguments.

[497] Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards on God and Creation*, 88. Crisp is defending Edwards from critics including Beilby and McClymond who hold that if God is essentially creative and delights in his creation – which both Edwards and Crisp affirm – then this puts God in the position of suffering some lack that is completed in his act of creation, and thus makes him dependent upon the creation. Our analysis will show that Crisp is correct to reject Beilby and McClymond on this point.

[498] Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards on God and Creation*, 90.

[499] Cf. Ian McFarland, *From Nothing: A Theology of Creation*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 139.

[500] Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards on God and Creation*, 90, my emphasis in bold; we will see Crisp continue this line of thought below in our discussion of Edwards' panentheism.

western church) truly require his "diminished account of creation"? We will see that this is not the case: it is Edwards' metaphysics, expressed in other texts, that colors the conclusions he reaches in "The End of Creation" – conclusions that do indeed affirm divine aseity, but which can be sustained without collapsing the creation into the creator, given a different metaphysical framework. We now seek to demonstrate this, turning to an exposition and analysis of "The End of Creation."

Edwards begins his argument in "The End of Creation" with three preliminary distinctions. First, he distinguishes between *ultimate* ends, which are pursued for their own sake, and *subordinate* ends, which are pursued in service to some other end.[501] Second, he distinguishes between a *chief* end, which is that which is most highly valued, as opposed to a less-valuable *inferior* end. He notes that every chief end is an ultimate end, but not vice versa – an end may be ultimate, pursued for its own sake, without being the highest thing aimed at by the agent.[502]

The last distinction that Edwards draws is subtle, but is critical to his argument: the distinction between *original* and *consequential* ends. The former are the completely independent ends – things which are good in themselves in a way that is not contingent on anything whatsoever – that motivate some action.[503] The latter may be ultimate ends in the sense of being good in themselves, but they are so contingently, only becoming ultimate ends upon certain conditions.[504]

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[501] YE8, 405.
[502] YE8, 407.
[503] YE8, 411. An original end is valued "antecedent to and *independent* of all conditions, or any supposition of particular cases and circumstances."
[504] YE8, 411. A consequential end is only valued "on supposition or condition of such and such circumstances or on the happening of such a particular case." The language of something which is true (necessarily or otherwise) only on *supposition* of some condition is similar to Aquinas'

Edwards gives the example of a man who seeks justice within his family. This end may be considered to be good in and of itself, and so be considered a final end. However, it only becomes so upon the man actually having a family, and so is considered a *consequential* end. In this case, Edwards writes, the man's *original* end is the value he places upon living in society, which moves him to seek a family in the first place; only once he has a family can he be concerned with its being a just family.[505] Edwards then applies this distinction to God's seeking his own glory through the expression of his attributes in creation. Like the man seeking justice in his family, God may be said to consider this increase to his glory as an ultimate end, a thing good in and of itself – but it is a *consequential* end, because it only becomes an end upon creation.

Edwards immediately applies this distinction to God's creation of the world:

> In like manner we must suppose that God before he created the world had some good in view, as a consequence of the world's existence, that was originally agreeable to him in itself considered, that inclined him to create the world, or bring the universe with various intelligent creatures into existence in such a manner as he created it. But after the world was created, and such and such intelligent creatures actually had existence, in such and such circumstances, then a wise, just regulation of them was agreeable to God, in itself considered. And God's love of justice, and hatred of injustice, would be sufficient in such a case to induce God to deal justly with his creatures, and to prevent all injustice in him towards them. But yet there is no necessity of supposing that God's love of doing justly to intelligent beings, and hatred of the contrary, was what originally induced God to create the world, and make intelligent beings; and so to order the occasion of doing either justly or unjustly. The justice of God's nature makes a just regulation agreeable, and the contrary disagreeable, as there is occasion, the subject being supposed and the occasion given: but

reference to those things which are necessary absolutely and those which are necessary only by supposition (ST Ia.19.3), and will serve a similar function.

[505] YE8, 411-412.

> we must suppose something else that should incline him to create the subjects or order the occasion.[506]

Consequential ends can be ultimate ends, in that they are pursued for their own sake, though only on supposition of some condition. But throughout the treatise, when Edwards speaks of God's ultimate end in the creation of the world, he means God's *original* ultimate end. God's original end is simply his own glory, which depends on absolutely nothing other than himself. It is this original end, independent of creation, that moves God to create.[507] Those ends that God pursues that depend on creation are themselves contingent, and depend ultimately on God's self-moved act of creation. With regard to this original ultimate end, "[t]hat which God had primarily in view in creating, and the original ordination of the world, must be constantly kept in view, and have a governing influence in all God's works, or with respect to everything that he does towards his creatures."[508]

Next Edwards moves to consider what may actually be God's (original, ultimate) end in creating the world. He begins by considering what may be learned by reason alone, apart from divine revelation, although he maintains that revelation is necessary to discern God's ends in creating. He begins by examining the question according to reason because most of the objections he will address "have been from the pretended dictates of reason," and so he wants to first take

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[506] YE8, 412.
[507] YE8, 411-412.
[508] YE8, 413. The same must apply to any of God's works of providence "in general," as opposed to his particular works of providence. God's providence in general must aim only at his original ultimate end, while particular acts of providence may be undertaken for the sake of ultimate ends which are consequential on his having created the world. YE8, 414.

them on their own terms.[509] In the course of his consideration, he lays out six conditions that must characterize God's original ultimate end in creating:[510]

1) God cannot be mutable or dependent on his creation in any way. "The notion of God's creating the world in order to receive anything properly from the creature is not only contrary to the nature of God, but inconsistent with the notion of creation; which implies a being's receiving its existence, and all that belongs to its being, out of nothing."[511]
2) God's end must be an ultimate end, valuable in and of itself, but also something obtainable by a divine operation. This rules out attributes which are essential to God, such as his existence or infinite perfection; these are valuable in and of themselves but are not consequential on any divine operation.
3) God's end must likewise be original, valuable in and of itself prior to the creation.
4) If God may in any way be his own end, it is reasonable to assume that he will be such, as his own perfection is infinitely greater than that of the creation.
5) Whatever God seeks for its own sake, absolutely and originally, in creating the world, must be regarded as God's original ultimate end in creating.

[509] YE8, 419-420.
[510] YE8, 419-427.
[511] YE8, 420.

6) Whatever God aims at for its own sake, which is a consequence of creating the world, is an ultimate end of creation, though it may not be God's *original* ultimate end.

Edwards then proceeds to elaborate on this last point, seeking to show what things may be regarded as *ultimate* ends for God in creating, but which are actually consequent on creation and thus cannot be regarded as his *original* ultimate end. So, for instance, the exercise of God's attributes such as his power, wisdom, righteousness, goodness, justice, and truth, are good in and of themselves. "If it be an excellent thing that there should be a sufficiency for a certain kind of action or operation, the excellency of such a sufficiency must consist in its relation to this kind of operation or effect; but that could not be, unless the operation itself were excellent."[512] And so it is "fit, proper and desirable" that these attributes be exercised, and that God delights in them.[513] Likewise, and by a similar argument, it seems fit and desirable that these attributes be known – and not only known, but loved - by creatures other than God.[514] Edwards infers, then, that God's glory is increased by the exercise of God's attributes and the knowledge of God by creatures other than himself:

> And as this fullness is capable of communication or emanation *ad extra*; so it seems a thing amiable and valuable in itself that it should be communicated or flow forth, that this infinite fountain of good should send forth abundant streams, that this infinite fountain of light should, diffusing its excellent fullness, pour forth light all around. And as this is in itself excellent, so a disposition to this in the Divine Being must be

512 YE8, 429.
513 YE8, 429-430.
514 YE8, 430-432. "If existence is more worthy than defect and nonentity, and if any created existence is in itself worthy to be, then knowledge or understanding is a thing worthy to be; and if any knowledge, then the most excellent sort of knowledge, viz. that of God and his glory." YE8, 432.

> looked upon as a perfection or an excellent disposition; such an emanation of good is, in some sense, a multiplication of it; so far as the communication or external stream may be looked upon as anything besides the fountain, so far it may be looked on as an increase of good.[515]

Because it seems fit and reasonable to suppose that the communication of God's infinite goodness is a thing valuable in and of itself to Edwards, he argues that this can be considered an ultimate end for God's act of creation. However, he then specifies that to communicate himself *to the creature* cannot be God's original ultimate end, because this depends on the creature; rather, Edwards concludes that "we may suppose *that a disposition in God, as an original property of his nature, to an emanation of his own infinite fullness, was what excited him to create the world; and so that the emanation itself was aimed at by him as a last end of the creation*."[516] Edwards' phrasing of this statement of God's original ultimate end very deliberately avoids making God dependent on anything beyond himself.

Continuing the same mode of argument, Edwards next endeavors to show that in making the "emanation of his own infinite fullness"[517] his original ultimate end in creating, God likewise aims at nothing but himself, manifesting a "supreme and ultimate regard for himself in all his works."[518] The argument is straightforward here – that because God delights in his perfections and virtues, he delights in their expressions and in the knowledge and communication of them, and so

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[515] YE8, 433.
[516] YE8, 432-435, emphasis in original. Language such as this has given rise to a major strand of literature on Edwards that proposes that his is a "dispositional ontology," with the preeminent representative of this view being Sang Hyun Lee in his book *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000) and other articles. Lee has been critiqued by scholars including Oliver Crisp, Kyle Strobel, and Stephen R. Holmes. My aim here is not to enter into this debate; I find the arguments of Crisp, Strobel, and Holmes to be the more compelling and build on their account in the analysis I conduct here.
[517] YE8, 435.
[518] YE8, 436.

makes himself his end in all his works. And because God always acts to maximize his own glory and with himself as supreme end, creation is necessary. Edwards goes as far as to say that God is less than complete without creation: "So God looks on the communication of himself, and the emanation of the infinite glory and good that are in himself to belong to the fullness and completeness of himself, as though he were not in his most complete and glorious state without it."[519] But once again, it is only the communication of himself that can be taken as an original end, as those exercises and knowledge of himself that depend on the creature can only be consequential ends.[520] Note that here is where we see the similarity between Edwards' distinction between consequential and original ends, and Aquinas' distinction between that which is necessary absolutely and that which is necessary only by supposition:[521] any action taken by God to increase his glory that depends on the creature can only be a *consequential* end, necessary only on *supposition* of the creature's existence, itself a contingent reality to which God must graciously give being.

But recall that consequential ends can be ultimate ends, worthy of pursuit in and of themselves. Edwards presses the point that God may have more than one ultimate end and that his acting for his own glory and for the good of the creation need not conflict with one another:

> …God's acting for himself, or making himself his last end, and his acting for [his creatures'] sake, are not to be set in opposition; or to be considered as the opposite parts of a disjunction: they are rather to be considered as coinciding one with the other, and implied one in the other. But yet God is to be considered as first and original in his regard; and the creature is the object of God's regard consequentially and by

[519] YE8, 439.
[520] YE8, 436-444.
[521] ST Ia.19.3.

> implication as being as it were comprehended in God; as shall be more particularly observed presently.[522]

Edwards speaks of creation as being a "communication of himself… [an] eternal emanation of the divine good…"[523]

The distinction between original and consequential ends is tremendously important for Edwards' argument; like Aquinas' distinction between things which are necessary absolutely and those which are necessary by supposition,[524] it allows Edwards the space to affirm that God is creative by his very essence without making his essence dependent on his act of creation or on the creation itself. This space lies between God necessarily aiming at his own glory and at its communication, and his aiming at the communication of his glory *to the creation* in particular. The former is God's original ultimate end, and depends on nothing other than himself; the latter depends on creation, but is only an ultimate end of God *consequentially*, contingent on the act of creation.

Edwards deals with several objections that one might raise to his views. The first of them is most relevant to our concerns here: that what he has said is inconsistent with God's independence and immutability, for two reasons: first, that it makes him dependent on the creature, and second, that it seems that God's aiming at some delight, even in himself, is inconsistent with his being eternally, perfectly, infinitely happy in himself.[525] "God's simplicity excludes any

[522] YE8, 440-441.
[523] YE8, 443.
[524] ST Ia.19.3.
[525] YE8, 445.

relation to creatures in which God receives an augmentation of his being from that to which he relates."[526]

Edwards answers that the delight that God has in the creature need not be different from the delight he eternally has in himself, and that it certainly isn't something he receives from the creature, as it is all his own work. "So that if we suppose God has real pleasure and happiness in the holy love and praise of his saints, as the image and communication of his own holiness, it is not properly any pleasure distinct from the pleasure he has in himself; but is truly an instance of it."[527] Indeed, if God delights in his own perfect goodness, then he must delight in its expression and communication and the knowledge of it. Moreover, while his delight in *particular* expressions and knowledge of his character depends on the creature, this delight is only an instance of, not an addition to or the beginning of, that delight that he eternally has in himself.[528]

Therefore, the ends which God pursues in the act of creation are all ultimately dependent upon nothing but himself. Edwards then goes further, arguing that not only the ends but also the means by which God pursues those ends are entirely within himself.[529] It is possible, Edwards argues, that God can have real delight in his acts of communication to creatures and the effects he produces in them without this delight adding to, or even being distinct from, the delight he has in himself.[530] It is "a necessary consequence" of the fact that God delights in

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[526] John Webster, "*Non Ex Aequo*: God's Relation to Creatures," in *God Without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology, Vol. 1* (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 126.
[527] YE8, 446.
[528] YE8, 447-448.
[529] Compare this to what we noted above in Aquinas, who does not believe that God has to will the means to his ends, though he does will the ordering of means to his ends. ST Ia.19.5.
[530] YE8, 446.

his own glory that he delights in the "emanation and effulgence" of that glory in creation; and for this reason, the expression of his glory adds nothing to the glory itself:

> Nor do any of these things argue any dependence in God on the creature for happiness. Though he has real pleasure in the creature's holiness and happiness; yet this is not properly any pleasure which he receives from the creature. For these things are what he gives the creature. They are wholly and entirely from him. Therefore they are nothing that they give to God by which they add to him. His rejoicing therein is rather a rejoicing in his own acts, and his own glory expressed in those acts, than a joy derived from the creature. God's joy is dependent on nothing besides his own act, which he exerts with an absolute and independent power. And yet, in some sense it can be truly said that God has the more delight and pleasure for the holiness and happiness of his creatures: because God would be less happy, if he was less good, or if he had not that perfection of nature which consists in a propensity of nature to diffuse of his own fullness. And he would be less happy, if it were possible for him to be hindered in the exercise of his goodness and his other perfections in their proper effects. But he has complete happiness, because he has these perfections, and can't be hindered in exercising and displaying them in their proper effects. And this surely is not thus, because he is dependent; but because he is independent on any other that should hinder him.[531]

Edwards gives two briefer answers to the same objection. First, it proves too much – it would suggest that God can do *nothing* in time, because he can have no aim in doing so.[532] And second, he argues that his way of stating things is the only way to avoid making God dependent – for if his original ultimate end in creating is only that desire to communicate his goodness which he holds eternally, then he does not go outside of himself in satisfying it.[533]

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[531] YE8, 447.
[532] YE8, 449.
[533] YE8, 450. Edwards addresses three other objections that are less relevant to our concerns here. First, that his views portray God as selfish; second, that they are unworthy of God; and third, that they detract from the freeness of God's goodness and the obligation to gratitude on the part of the creatures. YE8, 451-462. In his response to the last of these, he does make the

Having completed our exposition of Edwards' argument in *The End of Creation*, we are in a position to begin to evaluate the question with which we began this section: does Edwards' defense of divine aseity require him to give a "diminished account of the creation," denying that the creation is an end in itself? We have gestured at the answer already, noting that by distinguishing between consequential ultimate ends and original ultimate ends, Edwards provides himself with space to allow God to regard the creation as an end in itself without thereby making himself dependent on it in any way.

To be clear, Crisp's characterization of Edwards' account of creation as "diminished" – in particular, his panentheism and occasionalism - is on target, as will be demonstrated below. And Crisp's discussion of Edwards' panentheism lucidly demonstrates that Edwards' defense of divine aseity does not *logically* entail panentheism or occasionalism.[534] Nonetheless, both he and Holmes argue that Edwards could not have held to the doctrines of divine aseity and sovereignty as laid out in *The End of Creation* without also affirming panentheism and occasionalism; Crisp argues that, as Douglas Elwood has written, these followed from Edwards' attempt to find "'a third alternative' between classical theism and

interesting statement (arguing for the depth of gratitude the creature owes the creator) that "The exercises of [God's] communicative disposition are absolutely from within himself, not finding anything, or any object to excite them or draw them forth: but all that is good and worthy in the object, and the very *being* of the object, proceeding from the overflowing of his fullness." YE8, 462. This objection is also taken up in the companion dissertation to *The End for Which God Created the World*, entitled *The Nature of True Virtue*, found in YE8 and discussed by Holmes, *God of Grace and God of Glory*, 59-62.

[534] Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards on God and Creation*, 138-163. See esp. 142-144, in which Crisp lays out nine propositions that summarize his characterization of Edwards' panentheism. P1 is the "core thesis" of panentheism, that "[t]he world exists 'in' God." P2-P5 are relatively uncontroversial; P6-P9 are the stronger propositions expressing Edwards' idealism and occasionalism. The point is that Crisp presents these propositions as logically independent from each other, such that it would be possible to affirm some without affirming the others (he gives Thomas Aquinas as an example of a theologian who would do so).

pantheism that 'would do justice on the one hand to God's all-comprehensiveness, and on the other, to His creative presence in the world.'"[535]

On the contrary, I will argue that these positions depend critically on the metaphysical framework in which Edwards worked, which we will find most clearly laid out in *Of Being*, *Of Atoms*, and his treatise on *Original Sin*. But this framework was not required by what Edwards wrote in *The End of Creation*. Kyle Strobel's analysis of Edwards is more sophisticated on this point, paying due attention to Edwards' distinction between original and consequential ends,[536] and in particular indicating how the concept of *participation* is central to maintaining the balance between divine aseity and a robust doctrine of creation: "creation of the world, and creaturely reality in general, is a consequential ultimate end with the aim of glorifying God (participating in God's original ultimate end) through the receiving, knowing and loving of God's economic communication of himself."[537] Here Strobel recognizes that the ultimate end of creation can refer to nothing but God himself, e.g. "the diffusion of God's glory." As we have seen, Edwards argues that the exercise and manifestation of God's attributes increases his glory - if it is glorious that God possess the capacity for wisdom, for example, this can only be because the exercise of divine wisdom is glorious. And this, Edwards says, makes creation necessary, for "[i]f the world had not been created, [God's] attributes never would have had any exercise,"[538] these attributes laying forever "dormant and useless."[539] But Strobel reminds us that things like "the

[535] Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards on God and Creation*, 139, citing Douglas Elwood, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 21.
[536] Kyle Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology: A Reinterpretation* (London: T&T Clark, 2013), 75-104.
[537] Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology*, 84.
[538] YE8, 429.
[539] YE8, 429.

exercise of divine justice" are ultimate, but consequential and not original, ends of creation. He argues that this means that for Edwards, such attributes are "extrinsic to God, or, as Edwards's [*sic*] delineates them, they are *relative*."[540] This means that such attributes are "not constitutive of God's pure act, simplicity or immutability,"[541] and therefore could pose no threat to divine aseity. Such exercises of God's attributes do not constitute, but only instantiate, his excellency, glory, and being.

This allows Edwards to qualify his statement that God would be less complete without creation, removing the potential that this would make God dependent on creation. What this really means, he claims, is that "God would be less happy, *if he was less good,* or if he had not that perfection of nature which consists in a propensity of nature to diffuse of his own fullness."[542] It is not that creation adds anything to God, but rather that creation expresses what God eternally is, in and of himself, and so the statement that God would be less happy or less complete had he not created is simply a way of saying that God would be less glorious if he were other than himself. Edwards defends the claims that God is simple and God is pure act; he is what he does, and what he does expresses what he is essentially. The expression of God's attributes, such that they do not remain "dormant," does not constitute the actualization of unrealized potential in God, but is simply the outward diffusion of his eternal, fully realized, and

[540] Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology*, 80, emphasis in original.
[541] Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology*, 80n17.
[542] YE8, 447, my emphasis.

immutable fullness. God can thus be said to be essentially and eternally creative without this implying any dependence in God on the creation.

Despite these qualifications, there is cause for concern here. John Webster warns that in contemplation of the work of creation, "we may expect no relaxation of the rule that the Holy Trinity is perfect blessedness in himself in the absence of creatures. Indeed, it is especially in the matter of creation that the rule must be applied with utmost strictness; any loss of rigour will ruin whatever we go on to say of creation and creatures."[543]

In this case, if there is ruin in need of repair, we find it in agreement with Crisp in his assessment of Edwards' panentheism. Despite his defense of the classical doctrine of God and the classical teaching of God's creation of the world *ex nihilo*, Edwards espouses a doctrine of creation in which (according to Crisp's definition of panentheism) "the being of God includes and penetrates the whole universe, so that every part exists in Him, but his Being is more than, and not exhausted by, the universe."[544] Indeed, Edwards goes farther than this, concluding that the created world has no substance of its own, and thus calling into question whether God has truly brought into existence a second order of being, one which is not God – in other words, whether God has truly *created* at all.

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[543] John Webster, "Trinity and Creation," in *God Without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology, Vol. 1* (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 89. Elsewhere he writes: "God is unoriginated and self-subsistent, having his being not through or in relation to some other, but *per se*, God is fully actual, possessing no potency whose realization would extend or complete his being. God is immutable – already infinitely sufficient and complete and therefore beyond alteration or acquisition – and impassible – inexhaustibly alive, stable and entire in himself and so beyond the reach of any agent or act of contestation or depredation." John Webster, "*Non Ex Aequo*," 120.
[544] Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards on God and Creation*, 140.

As we will see, Edwards chooses a panentheistic resolution to the following dilemma. It seems desirable to affirm all of the following statements:

1. God is pure act: he is what he does, and there is no unrealized potential in him (pure act).
2. God is wholly sufficient in and of himself, dependent for his perfection on nothing outside of himself (aseity).
3. Creation and God are distinct from one another (creator/creature distinction).
4. Creation constitutes an order of causation distinct from God (the freedom of creatures, or the liberty of secondary causes).

Edwards affirms the pure act doctrine of God.[545] Likewise, he affirms the doctrine of divine aseity, and therefore the statement that creation can add nothing to him.[546] He is clearly no pantheist, insofar as he has no trouble with the creator/creature distinction.[547] But he stops short of a full affirmation of the last statement, concerning the freedom of creatures – not because it is in conflict with the other three or because it follows from Edwards' support of classical reformed doctrines such as divine sovereignty. Rather, we will show that the problem lies with the metaphysical framework in which Edwards worked out his theology – in particular, a framework characterized by a univocal understanding of being, by an account of causality that focuses on the efficient and extrinsic, and by an account of creaturely participation in the divine which is soteriological

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[545] YE1, 385-386; *Miscellany 1340*, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 23, The "Miscellanies," (Entry Nos. 1153-1360)*, ed. Douglas A. Sweeney (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004), hereafter YE23, 371-372.
[546] YE8, 531.
[547] YE8, 421.

and eschatological but not fully metaphysical. The difficulty with these is that they conflict with Edwards' espousal of simplicity. Univocity is in conflict with simplicity, because the simplicity of God is at the root of the real distinction.[548] If there is no composition in God, then this includes composition of essence and existence, and so God alone is existence essentially, distinct from all creatures. Thus being cannot be univocally predicated of God and creatures.

We now turn to an examination of the texts in which Edwards most clearly exposits his metaphysics.

Panentheism and Occasionalism (*Of Atoms, Of Being,* and *Original Sin*)

❖ Panentheism

Although Edwards rejects pantheism – the idea that nature is divine – he adopts a position of panentheism, that all of nature is included in God. Edwards began to work this position out in the early stages of his career, recorded in two of the treatises contained in his *Scientific and Philosophical Writings*,[549] "Of Being" and "Of Atoms." These texts were written early in Edwards' career, but they represent his mature metaphysical thought: as Anderson writes in his introduction to the volume, "[s]ome of these views were to be reshaped significantly in later writings; but his main conclusions—that matter neither exists nor acts by itself, but depends immediately on the immaterial divine Being—were to remain fixed centers of his thought."[550]

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[548] I am grateful to Simon Oliver for conversations that clarified this point.
[549] YE6.
[550] YE6, 26.

"Of Being" undertakes a version of the ontological argument for God's existence. In distinction from Anselm's approach to the argument, however, Edwards departs not from the idea of "that than which greater cannot be conceived,"[551] but from being itself. Edwards argues for the existence of an infinite, eternal, omnipresent being. That there should be nothing at all, he says, is a contradiction – although this is something which must be taken to be self-evident and unprovable, because *nothing* is that whereby we show all other contradictions.[552] This demonstrates the existence of a necessary being. This being must be omnipresent and eternal, because it makes no more sense to refer to a certain place and say "*there* is nothing," or to a certain time and say "nothing exists *then*," than it does to say that there is nothing in a universal sense. "So that we see this necessary, eternal being must be infinite and omnipresent."[553] Edwards then moves in quick succession to assert that *space* "is this necessary, eternal, infinite and omnipresent being,"[554] and that therefore, "space is God."[555]

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[551] It is worth noting that Anderson, like many commentators, says that Anselm begins with "the idea of God as the most perfect or greatest conceivable being." (YE6, 69) But Anselm does not refer to God as "a being" at all, but only as "something (*aliquid*) than which nothing greater can be conceived," or "that (*id*) than which nothing greater can be conceived." This may seem to be splitting hairs, but it is important to remind ourselves that God is not a *being* alongside other beings at all – not even the ultimate term of a hierarchy of ever-greater beings, as though his greatness could be characterized in proportion to the greatness of other things.

[552] YE6, 202. In other words, we show contradictions by showing that *there is not* a state in which the contradiction is true. We cannot use this very concept in a proof that it does or not exist: "there is nothing" is simply a nonsensical statement within the terms of our logic, for that logic begins by assuming that *nothing* does not exist.

[553] YE6, 202.

[554] YE6, 203. "We can remove them out of our minds, and place some other in the room of them; but space is the very thing that we can never remove and conceive of its not being."

[555] YE6, 203. "And it is indeed clear to me, that all the space there is not proper to body, all the space there is without the bounds of the creation, all the space there was before the creation, is God himself." In a footnote, Anderson ties this assertion directly to the influence of the Neoplatonist Henry More, who wrote, "This distant Space cannot but be something, and yet not corporeal, because neither impenetrable nor tangible; it must of necessity be a Substance Incorporeal necessarily and eternally existent of itself: which the clearer Idea of a Being absolutely perfect will more punctually inform us to be the Self-Subsisting God."

If space is God, does Edwards affirm pantheism after all? That he does not is clear from his writings in a second scientific treatise, "Of Atoms," where he argues not that created substance is divine, but that created substance is *nothing but* God. Edwards defines atoms as "bodies that are indiscerpible, that cannot be made less, or whose parts cannot by any finite power whatsoever, be separated one from another."[556] But these bodies, by virtue of being indivisible, cannot be destroyed at all. For if they were broken apart at one point as opposed to another, this would be a division, which is impossible by hypothesis – or, if you like, the resulting fragments would be even smaller indivisible atoms, and we could begin the process again. At some level, Edwards argues, there must be bodies which cannot be broken anywhere unless they are broken *everywhere*, which is to say annihilated, and this he takes to be impossible.[557] But this means that atoms are sustained by an *infinite* power – which cannot be a property of passive matter, but must derive from the immediate action of God.[558]

Bodies are composed of atoms, and so Edwards concludes that body, solidity, and resistance are all equivalent, and that all derive from the immediate exertion of the infinite power of God in sustaining atoms: "it follows that all body is nothing but what immediately results from the exercise of divine power in such a particular manner."[559] The same is true for motion: it "is from the immediate exercise of divine power so communicating that resistance, according to certain conditions which we call the laws of motion. How truly then is it in him that we

[556] YE6, 208. Anderson notes the influence of More, as well as Locke and Newton, on Edwards' characterization of the natural world here.
[557] YE6, 208-210.
[558] YE6, 214.
[559] YE6, 215.

live, move and have our being."[560] And so, finally, he concludes that created substance is nothing other than God: "So that the substance of bodies at last becomes either nothing, or nothing but the Deity acting in that particular manner in those parts of space where he thinks fit. So that, speaking most strictly, there is no proper substance but God himself (we speak at present with respect to bodies only). How truly, then, is he said to be *ens entium*."[561] The distinction we are seeking to draw, recall, is between what Edwards is saying and the Thomistic understanding of creation. The latter agrees that when considering God and his creation, we do not have two things alongside one another, nor two foci of being but only one, which is God, and that all created things have their existence only by participation in God. But a participatory metaphysic also affirms that this real distinction[562] means that the creation is truly not God, rather than being contained in him or "nothing but the Deity."

God's act of creation, then, is not a matter of his giving being to a reality or order other than himself, but only his direct and immediate action within space:

> We by this also clearly see that creation of the corporeal universe is nothing but the first causing resistance in such parts of space as God thought fit, with a power of being communicated successively from one part of space to another, according to such stated conditions as his infinite wisdom directed; and then the first beginning of this communication, so that ever after it might be continued without deviating from those stated conditions.[563]

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[560] YE6, 215-216.
[561] YE6, 215.
[562] Strictly speaking, the real distinction refers to the fact that God alone is essentially existing, which is to say, necessary being, whereas for all other things, existence is not part of their essence but must be given by creation – but this is simply another way of saying that God alone exists subsistently, while other things have being only by participation in him.
[563] YE6, 216.

To be clear, Edwards is not saying that matter *is* God or that God is solid or resists, but that the solidity and resistance of a body depends on the immediate exercise of God's power,[564] which puts in doubt a classical Christian understanding of primary and secondary causality.

Edwards' reference to "such stated conditions" from which the course of nature never deviates sounds somewhat deist, as though God had created the world with its natural laws, set it spinning, and simply withdrawn. But nothing could be further from Edwards' position: his God never withdraws, but is constantly, intimately connected to the universe he has created, even to the point of being its very substance, and as we will now see, its only actor. Edwards' panentheism collapses all being into that of the creator; as we will now see, his occasionalism collapses all action into that of the creator, and indeed, all action into creation.

❖ Occasionalism

Occasionalism is the belief that God is the sole causal agent in the world, such that his power is the power behind *all* effects, with so-called "secondary causes" being merely the *occasion* for the exercise of his power rather than exercising any causal power of their own.[565] Holmes argues that this is for Edwards "a fixed position, found in an early *Miscellanies* entry, and present still in *Original Sin*,

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564 Wallace E. Anderson, introduction to *Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, YE6, 66. One of Edwards' chief aims was to refute Hobbes' materialist argument that God, if he exists, must be matter, along with all substance. Anderson writes that "Edwards finds God alone is substance while matter is the immediate effect of the exercise of God's infinite power. It follows that God himself cannot be material." Anderson, introduction to *Scientific and Philsophical Writings*, YE6, 53-54.

565 "Indeed, in natural things means of effects in metaphysical strictness are not proper cause of the effects, but only occasions. God produces all effects." *Miscellany 629*, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 18, The "Miscellanies," (Entry Nos. 501-832)*, ed. Ava Chamberlain (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000), hereafter 18.

finished the year before Edwards' death."[566] He continues, arguing in a manner similar to Crisp that Edwards' other commitments required his occasionalism:

> Existence is, for created realities, the condition of being present to the mind of God. Without trying to divine Edwards' underlying conception of the nature of God's eternity, this position nevertheless surely demands that Edwards says what he does about continuous creation: for God to think of the beginning of a creature and to think of the continued existence of a creature are not radically different divine acts in the way that creating a material substance-world, and sustaining it, are. … Edwards' concern can perhaps be seen… to be a polemical insistence on the radically dependent nature of creation, attacking the assumptions of matter that is itself *a se* (that is, that does not need God to exist) or a 'world-machine' that, having been set going by God, does not need His upholding to continue.[567]

Edwards' transition from a doctrine of continuous creation to that of occasionalism can be seen mostly clearly in what Clyde Holbrook refers to as "one of the most creative pieces of reasoning to be found in" his treatise on *Original Sin*,[568] which is framed as a response to the objections to the doctrine written by the Arminian John Taylor. One of these objections was that it was improper to impute Adam's guilt to his posterity because to do so treats as one persons who are distinct. We begin our exposition by examining Edwards' response to this critique, in which he argues that it is founded on a false hypothesis concerning what it means to call a thing *one* or *the same* – whether what is in view is the identity of a single person over time, or, more generally, the sameness of any created substance from moment to moment.[569]

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[566] Stephen R. Holmes, *God of Grace and God of Glory: An Account of the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 92.
[567] Holmes, *God of Grace and God of Glory*, 92-93.
[568] Clyde A. Holbrook, introduction to *Original Sin*, YE3, 55.
[569] YE3, 397.

Some things, Edwards, argues, although diverse, are constituted as one by "an established law of nature."[570] Edwards gives the example of the oneness of a tree with the sprout from which it grew, though "perhaps not one atom [is] the very same…"[571] and of a forty year-old man being one with the infant.[572] Edwards characterizes this unity as being "according to the course of nature," notwithstanding that "the union and mutual communication they have, has existence, and is entirely regulated and limited, according to the sovereign pleasure of God, and the constitution he has been pleased to establish."[573] Here Edwards implies that the law of nature and the law of the Creator – even, if you like, the *arbitrary* divine constitution which depends on nothing other than the divine will – are identical.

Edwards does not wait long to spell this implication out, doing so explicitly as he turns to Locke in applying this concept to the notion of personal identity. He disagrees with Locke that personal identity can be entirely constituted by a single consciousness persisting over time – but says, for the sake of argument, suppose that it is: even so, a single consciousness and the continuity of the memory would depend "wholly on a divine establishment."[574] Why? Suppose, he says, that one will object that this continuity of consciousness and memory is of the very nature of the soul, needing no recourse to the direct action of God. Then, he writes, quoting Taylor against himself,

> …let it be remembered, who it is, gives the soul this nature; and let that be remembered, which Dr. Taylor says of the course of

[570] YE3, 397.
[571] YE3, 397.
[572] YE3, 398.
[573] YE3, 398.
[574] YE3, 398.

> nature, before observed; denying, that 'the course of nature is a proper active cause, which will work and go on by itself without God, if he lets and permits it'; saying, that 'the course of nature, separate from the agency of God, is no cause, or nothing,' and affirming, that 'it's absolutely impossible, the course of nature should continue itself, or go on to operate by itself, any more than produce itself' and that **'God, the original of all being, is the ONLY CAUSE of all natural effects**.'[575]

Here it should be noted that, on the one hand, Edwards *affirms* that to the extent that the soul (or any other created thing) has a *nature*, that nature is given and created by God. This is a traditional way of referring to God as the primary cause in his role as creator. But he immediately cites Taylor (approvingly on this point, though he is working to refute him on original sin) to deny that a created nature can itself be *causal*. The underlying assumption is that each effect can have but one cause; if God is that cause, no created thing can be. Thus Edwards is implicitly bringing God and creatures into the same ontological plane. Primary and secondary causation cannot co-exist; the former drives out the latter. This leads Edwards to claim that in fact there is no action but creation, and no actor but the creator.

From these arguments Edwards derives the principle that identity of consciousness "depends wholly on a law of nature; and so, on the sovereign will and agency of God," which, again, are in fact identical.[576] But as we noted above, Edwards does not concede that Locke is correct in tying personal identity to a single consciousness. For this reason, as he continues to deal with this objection to the doctrine of original sin, he moves on to consider other things, besides identity of consciousness, that might constitute the personal identity necessary to

[575] YE3, 399; my emphasis in bold.
[576] YE3, 399.

hold a person guilty for sin. He begins by dealing with the guilt of a person for the sins that *he himself* has committed in the past, which no one will dispute; his goal will be to show that the conditions necessary for this apply no less to different individuals, allowing for the imputation of original sin.

In particular, he now broadens his consideration *beyond* personal identity, to "the identity of created substance itself…"[577] He points out that this identity is not self-subsistent like that of the creator, but is dependent on God. This, he believes, is an uncontroversial statement, but what is of interest to him is *why* it is true. He writes: "That God does, by his immediate power, *uphold* every created substance in being, will be manifest, if we consider, that their present existence is a *dependent* existence, and therefore is an *effect*, and must have some *cause*: and the cause **must be one of these two: either the *antecedent existence* of the same substance, or else the *power of the Creator***."[578]

These two candidates for causal power, Edwards assumes, are mutually exclusive. And moreover, the cause of the present existence of created substance can't be the antecedent existence of the same substance, for two reasons. First, because the existence of the same substance the moment before is no more active, and no less passive and dependent, than the existence of the substance at the present moment: it too must have some cause, which must also be either the power of the Creator or the substance's prior existence. So this explanation would simply move the question of causation back a moment in time.[579] But secondly, "no

[577] YE3, 399-400.
[578] YE3, 400; my emphasis in bold.
[579] "God's upholding created substance, or causing its existence in each successive moment, is altogether equivalent to an *immediate production out of nothing*, at each moment, because its existence

cause can produce effects in a *time* and *place* in which itself is *not*."[580] Edwards takes this second reason to apply to any two different moments – they cannot be causally connected, whether they are successive in time or separated by a thousand years. The antecedently existing created substance, by definition, simply does not exist at the present moment, and so can exert no causal influence on the presently existing created substance. "Therefore the existence of created substances, in each successive moment, must be the effect of the *immediate* agency, will, and power of God."[581]

As in his discussion of consciousness, Edward immediately allows that this can all be described as following the course of nature, but reminds his readers of "what nature is, in created things: and what the established course of nature is; that, as has been observed already, it is nothing, separate from the agency of God; and that, as Dr. Taylor says, 'God, the original of all being, is the ONLY cause of all natural effects.'"[582] This means, he writes, "that God's *preserving* created things in being is perfectly equivalent to a *continued creation*, or to his creating those things out of nothing at *each moment* of their existence."[583] And because God is the *only* cause of natural effects, continuous creation becomes the *only* explanation for created substances and all of the natural phenomenon one might observe;[584] their persistence over time is reduced to an

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at this moment is not merely in part from God, but wholly from him and not in any part, or degree, from its antecedent existence." YE3, 402, emphasis original.

[580] YE3, 400. Edwards was naturally unaware of quantum entanglement, but it's not hard to see how he could apply the same argument he's making here to any natural phenomenon whatsoever.

[581] YE3, 400 – 401.

[582] YE3, 401.

[583] YE3, 401.

[584] Edwards states very clearly in a footnote at YE3, 402, that divine and creaturely causation are mutually exclusive, lying along the same ontological plane: "Because its existence at this moment is not merely in part from God, but wholly from him; and not in any part, or degree, from its antecedent existence. For the supposing, that its antecedent existence concurs with God

illusion, and the only real action is God's act of creation from nothing, "a new exertion of the divine power" at each moment, independently of any other: "It will follow from what has been observed, that God's upholding created substance, or causing its existence in each successive moment, is altogether equivalent to an *immediate production out of nothing*, at each moment."[585] Each moment of creation differs from the first only "circumstantially"; God's acts of creation from nothing which we refer to as preservation happen to follow other acts of creation, but they don't depend on antecedent existence any more than the first.

Edwards' aim has been to show that things which are diverse can be treated as one; at this point he could be accused of having proved too much, showing instead that things we *thought* were one are, in fact, diverse! But this is not the case, he says: in fact, there *is* such thing as identity or oneness in created substances, but only "what depends on the *arbitrary* constitution of the Creator; who by his wise sovereign establishment so unites these successive new effects, that he *treats them as one*… and so, leads us to regard and treat them as one."[586] "Arbitrary" does not mean random or capricious, for an arbitrary constitution of the creator depends on the divine will, which in turn depends on the unchangeable divine wisdom. Edwards concludes that the objection he has been working to refute is built on the false premise that there is an identity in created things distinct from anything depending on a divine constitution. To the

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in efficiency, to produce some part of the effect, is attended with all the very same absurdities, which have been shown to attend the supposition of its producing it wholly. Therefore the antecedent existence is nothing, as to any proper influence or assistance in the affair: and consequently God produces the effect as much from nothing, as if there had been nothing before."

[585] YE3, 402.

[586] YE3, 403.

contrary, he argues: "a *divine constitution* is the thing which *makes truth*, in affairs of this nature."[587] As Holbrook writes in his introduction: "The bedrock structure of metaphysical truth determined what was true or false, and that bedrock was the will of God, the sheer arbitrary decisiveness of God, who makes things to be what they are."[588]

Edwards is right that it is uncontroversial to assert that the existence of created things is a dependent existence; God alone is self-subsistent. And this does indeed imply that creation is not only *ex nihilo*, but *continua*: God must give being to his creation at every moment. But Edwards' occasionalism, which reduces the set of actors and actions to one (God alone, and creation alone – for what appears to be providence is in fact identical to creation), goes beyond this because he assumes that divine and creaturely causation are mutually exclusive, being of the same sort ontologically.

Edwards' version of occasionalism included the belief that nothing created endures over time. Rather, for Edwards, *creatio continua* means not simply that God "sustains the world by the word of his power" at every moment, but that he creates each moment of the world, whole and entire, completely independent from any other moment, and then orders them in succession, giving the appearance of continuity over time.[589] "'Tis certain with me," he writes, "that the

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[587] YE3, 404.
[588] Holbrook, introduction to *Original Sin*, YE3, 58.
[589] "[U]pholding the world in being, and creating of it, are not properly distinct works; for 'tis manifest, that… creating of the world is but the beginning of upholding it, if I may so say; the beginning to give the world a supported and dependent existence: and preservation is only continuing to give it such a supported existence." *Miscellany* 1358, in YE23. Holmes rightly points out that the notion of continuous creation espoused here is not at variance with what can be found in standard works of reformed orthodoxy, citing Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 251-63.

world exists anew every moment, that the existence of things every moment ceases and is every moment renewed."[590] As Oliver Crisp writes, it is as though God is a projectionist, playing a motion picture which appears to be a single entity enduring over time, but which in fact is a series of stills played in rapid succession, giving the illusion of continuity.[591]

The Metaphysical Roots of Edwards' Panentheistic, Occasionalist Doctrine of Creation

We now turn to an analysis of these texts in order to tease out *why* Edwards' laudable defense of divine aseity and other aspects of the classical doctrine of God leads him to panentheism.

Oliver Crisp has said, in effect, that Edwards could not have upheld the doctrines of divine sovereignty and aseity without affirming panentheism.[592] Stephen Holmes agrees: summarizing Edwards' response to his materialist contemporaries in *Of Being* and *Of Atoms*, Holmes writes that "[Edwards] answered a central question of the philosophy of his day, concerning the nature of 'substance', the thing which 'stood underneath and kept up solidity and all other properties…'. Edwards argued that, in these terms, the only proper substance is God, who alone can give permanence and reality to the world. Any other answer will eventually insist on something else that is *a se*, that can exist of itself without reference to God. **Edwards' answer, then, is surely the only**

[590] *Miscellany 125[a]*, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 13, The "Miscellanies": (Entry Nos. a-zz, aa-zz, 1-500)*, ed. Harry S. Stout (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1994), 288.
[591] Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards on God and Creation*, 26.
[592] "I argue that his [panentheism] is the outcome of his doctrine of God and his idealist understanding of the relationship between God and creation." Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards on God and Creation*, 139.

appropriately Christian answer if the question is framed in these terms, and shows that it is precisely this Christian answer that can avoid the denigration of matter."[593] On the contrary, I argue that a Christian response properly avoids the denigration of matter precisely by refusing the terms in which both Edwards and his materialist interlocutors framed their questions.

In particular, in this section I will highlight the ways in which Edwards' metaphysics, as we have just summarized it in *Of Being*, *Of Atoms*, and *Original Sin*, concedes two key metaphysical assumptions. First, although Edwards does not explicitly affirm the univocity of being, Edwards does work with a functionally univocal understanding of being. That is, Edwards treats the being of God and the being of creatures as though they were members of a class – "Being in general," or a "universal system of existence." This contrasts with the understanding common to patristic sources and worked out in Thomas' doctrine that being can be applied to God and creatures only analogically, because whereas God is being essentially, creatures can only be said to have being by participation in the divine being. Moreover, it violates divine simplicity – which Edwards sought to uphold – because if God and creatures belong to a common class of being, then God is at the very least composed of this common genus "being" and whatever it is that picks him out as God in particular. Or, put another way, if God is simple, then his essence and existence are identical, which constitutes the real distinction affirmed by Thomas, and means that being cannot be univocally predicated of both God and his creation. Second, his account of causality emphasizes efficient causality, and where he makes reference to teleological

[593] Holmes, *God of Grace and God of Glory*, 90, my emphasis in bold.

causation, he restricts his understanding of final causality to that which is extrinsic, rather than intrinsic to the creature. This is most clearly signified by his tendency to put divine and human causality into competition with one another, with the former ultimately driving out the latter. Thus, in sum, Edwards fails to incorporate an account of participation which is not only eschatological and soteriological, but metaphysical, an aspect of creation as much as salvation. Edwards knows of human participation in the divine, but as an eschatological and soteriological category only, not a metaphysical one: participation in the divine is for Edwards the *telos* but not the origin and history of humanity.[594]

Edwards' metaphysical commitments are unsurprising given the context in which he wrote. He consciously adopted the ideas of David Hume, John Locke, and Isaac Newton in defending religion against materialists such as Thomas Hobbes. These thinkers had largely dispensed with the notion of metaphysical *substance* altogether, turning instead to empiricism, which simply observed the natural universe and sought to describe the laws by which it operates, without explaining *why*.[595] The notion of substance that they had rejected was Aristotelian in origin; despite the influence (on Edwards among others) of Neoplatonists such as Henry More, few thinkers entertained the possibility of a more Platonic metaphysics of participation and of intrinsic final or formal causality. Leibniz had argued that Newton was in danger of reintroducing mystery to science. Edwards agreed, approvingly – everything in nature, including its existence moment to moment,

[594] As mentioned above, this is why his understanding of the "history" of the creation is an occasionalist one.
[595] "The failure of medieval scholastic accounts of substance was everywhere accepted, and the rising popularity of atomism (the old Greek idea that everything is composed of tiny particles arranged in different patterns) made materialistic accounts seem attractive." Holmes, *God of Grace and God of Glory*, 82; see also Anderson's introduction to *Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, YE6.

was nothing other than an immediate action of God. Edwards viewed this as "an adequate answer to the then popular materialism that was derived from Hobbes."[596]

Unlike Edwards' account of being and of causality, Thomas' metaphysics are grounded in the concept of participation. This is not to say that participation plays no role in Edwards' theology, but it appears in his discussion of consummation, not his account of creation – it is a soteriological concept, not a metaphysical one. Edwards speaks of the end of creatures being participation in God, union with the divine:

> The creature is no further happy with this happiness which God makes his ultimate end than he becomes one with God. The more happiness the greater union: when the happiness is perfect, the union is perfect. And as the happiness will be increasing to eternity, the union will become more and more strict and perfect; nearer and more like to that between God the Father and the Son; who are so united, that their interest is perfectly one. If the happiness of the creature be considered as it will be, in the whole of the creature's eternal duration, with all the infinity of its progress, and infinite increase of nearness and union to God; in this view, the creature must be looked upon as united to God in an infinite strictness.[597]

Edwards speaks of this union which is increasing infinitely over time, but never complete – an asymptotic union.[598] This union is the ultimate end for God's creatures, and in places Edwards' account is expressed in teleological terms that can appear to introduce final causation back into his metaphysical framework:

> In the creature's knowing, esteeming, loving, rejoicing in, and praising God, the glory of God is both exhibited and acknowledged; his fullness is received and returned. Here is both

[596] Holmes, *God of Grace and God of Glory*, 81.
[597] YE8, 533-534.
[598] YE8, 534-535.

> an *emanation* and *remanation*. The refulgence shines upon and into the creature, and is reflected back to the luminary. The beams of glory come from God, and are something of God, and are refunded back again to their original. So that the whole is *of God*, and *in* God, and *to* God; and God is the beginning, middle and end in this affair.[599]

And yet, the causal power of God as end is portrayed not as something intrinsic to the creature, but as extrinsic – a movement toward God *and of God*. It is helpful at this point to remember that *The End of Creation* is only the first of two dissertations, intended to be read together; the second, *True Virtue*, seeks to demonstrate that the heart of virtue is love of Being, considered generally, and that therefore the height of virtue is love of God. Edwards argues that this definition applies both to creatures and to God himself: true virtue will consist in both aiming at God as ultimate end.[600] But critically, the movement of creatures toward God, and their being created to make that movement ever more, drawing into ever-closer, though never complete, union with him, is in no way an intrinsic property of the creature. Rather, the creature is moved by God:

> God aims at that which the motion or progression which he causes aims at, or tends to. If there be many things supposed to be so made and appointed, that by a constant and eternal motion, they all tend to a certain center; then it appears that he who made them and is the cause of their motion, aimed at that center, that term of their motion to which they eternally tend, and are eternally, as it were, striving after. And if God be this center, then God aimed at himself. And herein it appears that as he is the first author of their being and motion, so he is the last end, the final term, to which is their ultimate tendency and aim.[601]

Edwards' account of participation is an account of where the creature is going, but not of the creature's intrinsic being – it is restricted to the *end* of creation

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[599] YE8, 531.
[600] YE8, 535, 540-541.
[601] YE8, 534-535.

rather than filling out an understanding of what creation is. Participation in God is, moreover, understood as something extrinsic to the creature; it is "God [who] aimed at himself," rather than the creature having God as its end as something intrinsic to its essence as created.

Edwards' occasionalism derives from his desire to defend the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. A world that persists over time, Edwards reasons, must depend on more than God. Each moment of such a world would depend as well on its antecedent state; God would be constrained to conform some aspects of the present world to the corresponding aspects of the world one moment earlier. Edwards will not allow that God is constrained in this way, and therefore holds that God must create each separate moment of the world in total freedom, independently from his creation of any other moment of the world.

Edwards' account of creation puts divine and human causality in competition with one another. He goes beyond the implication of *creatio ex nihilo* that creation is nothing *of itself*; for Edwards, creation is simply without substance. But once again, this appears to be the case because Edwards assumes that if creatures are real, have real substance of their own, or have truly causal power of their own, then this implies that they are real, substantial, or causal *of themselves*. Edwards fails to allow that God's creative power could extend to the creation and sustaining of creatures with their own – radically dependent but nonetheless real and intrinsic - creaturely integrity and causal power. And so ironically, Edwards' desire to defend the freedom and sovereignty of God actually *limits* what God can create: he cannot create creatures that persist over time or that possess real substance or causal efficacy; their subsistence must be extrinsically imposed.

But here Edwards is falling into an error that has recently been diagnosed by Ian MacFarland in his monograph *From Nothing*.[602] The error is to assume that a created entity that persists over time must do so by some capacity that it possesses intrinsically *and* independently. Such a capacity would, of course, be inconsistent with *creatio ex nihilo*; this is precisely Edwards' concern. But if all creaturely intrinsic capacities must be dependent on God for their existence, there is nothing preventing God from endowing – and, indeed, sustaining at every moment – his creatures with the capacity to persist over time. In other words, what truly conflicts with *creatio ex nihilo* is not that creatures would have the capacity to endure, but that they would have that capacity independently of God's works of creation and providence, and Edwards has made the mistake of assuming that the former implies the latter.

Edwards' aim is always to preserve and magnify the glory of God. "Ironically," as MacFarland writes, "the occasionalist ends up limiting divine power… by failing to acknowledge that God's power includes the capacity to create beings with their own causal efficacy."[603] Occasionalism collapses divine providence and continual creation, ascribing to God the *origination* but not the *perfection* of his creatures. But it is to God's glory that those things created *and governed* by him are perfected to be the cause of goodness in other things, such relationships of secondary causality being given existence by Him at every moment.[604]

[602] McFarland, *From Nothing* 137-142.
[603] McFarland, *From Nothing*, 139.
[604] ST Ia.103.6.

This is related to the idea of primary and secondary causes, a well-known element of classical Christian, including reformed, theology.[605] But it is critical to situate the affirmation of secondary causes within a metaphysical framework that understands *how* they are secondary: not that they are simply subsequent, subordinate, or merely weaker than primary – divine – cause, but that primary and secondary causes exist on separate and non-competing ontological planes: secondary causes subsist as *caused* causes, compositions of potency and act, while primary causation is unoriginate. In short, primary causation refers to God's giving existence to the entire order of secondary causation, that order of motion and change that can be explored by scientific means; being the ground of that order, it must be outside of it, so that divine creative action is neither motion nor change, and does not compete with creaturely action even as it sovereignly ordains and orders it (these two conflict only when divine action is brought within the created order of causation).

Edwards nowhere explicitly affirms univocity of being. In *True Virtue*, however, the dissertation that accompanies *The End for Which God Created the World*, he refers to "Being in general": "Every intelligent being is some way related to Being in general, and is a part of the universal system of existence; and so stands in

[605] "God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established." Westminster Confession of Faith, as adopted by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (Willow Grove, Pennsylvania: The Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2005), hereafter WCF, III.1.

connection with the whole; what can its general and true beauty be, but its union and consent with the great whole?"[606] Later, he notes that

> [T]rue virtue must chiefly consist in love to God; the Being of beings, infinitely the greatest and best of beings. This appears, whether we consider the primary or secondary ground of virtuous love. It was observed that the *first* objective ground of that love, wherein true virtue consists, is Being, simply considered: and as a necessary consequence of this, that being who has the most of being, or the greatest share of universal existence, has proportionably the greatest share of virtuous benevolence, so far as such a being is exhibited to the faculties of our minds, other things being equal. But God has infinitely the greatest share of existence, or is infinitely the greatest being. So that all other being, even that of all created things whatsoever, throughout the whole universe, is as nothing in comparison of the Divine Being.[607]

God, Edwards writes, is "the head of the universal system of existence … whose being and beauty is as it were the sum and comprehension of all existence and excellence."[608] And yet again he refers to God as being *within* the system of existence, albeit as its head: "If the Deity is to be looked upon as within that system of beings which properly terminates our benevolence, or belonging to that whole, certainly he is to be regarded as the head of the system, and the chief part of it."[609]

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606 YE8, 541. I am indebted to email correspondence and an unpublished paper by Clayton Hutchins for the citations in this paragraph.

607 YE8, 550. Ramsey notes, "This reference treats God comparatively as a being among beings, even though 'highest.'" YE8, 550n6.

608 YE8, 551.

609 YE8, 553-554. This last passage is admittedly phrased conditionally ("*If* the Deity is to be looked upon as within that system…") suggesting that at least here Edwards may simply be acknowledging the limits of language. The closest that he comes to arguing that we can reason from creaturely realities to the divine is when he notes that if we start with "understanding or volition, love or hatred… in our own minds," then "we can add degrees, and deny limits, and remove changeableness and other imperfections, and ascribe them to God. Which is the only way we come to be capable of conceiving of anything in the Deity." YE8, 591-592. Cf. the discussion in W. Ross Hastings, *Jonathan Edwards and the Life of God: Toward an Evangelical Theology of Participation* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2015), 65-72. In his Miscellanies he writes, "Many have wrong conceptions of the difference between the nature of the Deity and created spirits. The difference is no contrariety, but what naturally results from his greatness and nothing else, such as created spirits come nearer to, or more imitate, the greater they are in their powers and faculties. So that if we should suppose the faculties of a created spirit to be enlarged infinitely,

But more importantly, Edwards demonstrates in his discussions of causality and the relationship between divine and human action that he is working from a functional metaphysics of univocity, hostile to divine simplicity and a true affirmation of secondary causes. There is no action in the universe that is not ultimately an action of God, and the only proper substance is God, "who alone can give permanence and reality to the world."[610] The primary way that Edwards' univocity works itself out is in his understanding of causation.

Edwards' main discussion of primary and secondary causes comes in an unpublished work known as Miscellany 1263.[611] In this work, Edwards distinguishes between *arbitrary* and *natural* operations, which he also refers to as the *immediate* and *mediate* action of God. Arbitrary action, which he associates with divine or primary causality, excludes natural action, associated with creaturely or secondary causality, so that the two are set in opposition to each other, competing for ontological space.

Edwards places *immediate* and *mediate* action in opposition to one another. He writes, "…there must be some of his creatures t[hat] he continues to act upon immediately. 'Tis nonsense to say he a[cts] upon all mediately, because in so doing w[e] go back *in infinitum* from one thing acting on another without ever coming to a prime, present agent, and yet at the same time suppose God to be

there would be the Deity to all intents and purposes, the same simplicity, immutability, etc." YE13, 295. Seng-Kong Tan cites this miscellany as evidence that in his "less careful moments [Edwards] admits a sort of univocity that even Scotus was careful to avoid." Seng-Kong Tan, *Fullness Received and Returned: Trinity and Participation in Jonathan Edwards* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2014), 66.

610 Holmes, *God of Grace and God of Glory*, 90.

611 YE23. This is another early and unpublished work, but the ideas contained in it persists to Edwards' more mature work, seen particularly in *The Freedom of the Will*, discussed above.

such a present agent."[612] Similarly, he explicitly describes arbitrary and natural operations as mutually exclusive: "When I speak of arbitrary operation, I don't mean arbitrary in opposition to an operation directed by wisdom, but in opposition to an operation confined to and limited by those fixed establishments and laws commonly called the laws of nature. The one of these I shall therefore, for want of better phrases, call *a natural operation;* the other, *an arbitrary operation*."[613] So if we are going to claim that God is always the primary cause for any created effect, then such an effect must always be traceable back to God's immediate or arbitrary action, even if we have to trace through a very long chain of mediate/natural actions to get there. But this means that whereas, when God acts immediately, he is present in that action, he is, on the other hand, at some remove from mediate action: mediate action makes use of creaturely reality as an instrument.

Once again, Edwards has made a move which is intended to preserve God's freedom, but ends up restricting it, at least within certain realms of the created order. Edwards' comments on arbitrary and natural operations are made in response to those deists, contemporary to him, who argue that God never "acts any otherwise than as limiting himself by such invariable laws, fixed from the beginning of the creation, when he precisely marked out and determined the rules and paths of all his future operations,"[614] so that God may have acted immediately at creation but now acts only mediately through the laws of nature. His concern is that if any created effect could be said to be *fully* explained by

[612] YE23, 201.
[613] YE23, 202.
[614] YE23, 202.

mediate (or secondary) causes, then we would have identified a phenomenon from which God is absent, or in which he is totally constrained by "invariable laws." Of course God remains creator of all – natural operations owe their existence to God's arbitrary actions which first laid down the laws according to which they operate – but Edwards writes that God's glory is maximized in those actions in which he is completely free, unconstrained by such laws: "'Tis the glory of God that he is an arbitrary being, that originally he, in all things, acts as being limited and directed in nothing but his own wisdom, tied to no other rules and laws but the directions of his own infinite understanding."[615]

But once again, in an attempt to uphold God's freedom, Edwards actually imposes a restraint on God's causal power, making him less present, or even absent, in mediate action that follows the observable laws of nature.[616] Again, mediate/arbitrary and immediate/natural action – secondary and primary causes – are being put in competition with one another. "An operation is absolutely arbitrary when no use [is] made of any law of nature [and] no respect had to any one [su]ch fixed rule or method."[617] But in making this move, Edwards worked within the terms of his opponents' deism, allowing only that God can intervene *immediately* at more times than the beginning but restricting his activity in any natural chain of events. He notes that the only *purely* arbitrary action of God with respect to creation was *creatio ex nihilo*; all other actions, including bringing the world from chaos to order, presupposed laws of nature and pre-existing matter

615 YE23, 202-203.
616 What changed in Edwards' thought was a strengthening of his occasionalism, so that in the end he would simply *remove* the concept of mediate action that was anything but the immediate power of the Creator.
617 YE23, 203.

and were thus in some respect natural *and therefore constrained*.[618] But this is a misunderstanding of both *creatio ex nihilo* and *creatio continua*: the former means that every creature is and always remains nothing *of itself*, and God's providence over his creatures means that he is causally present, as creator, in a full and equal sense to *every* creature and event. The difference between mediate and immediate action is not that God is causally present only to the latter, but rather that in mediate action we can identify secondary causes *as well as*, and *without pushing to the side*, God as primary cause.

A Metaphysical Alternative

To conclude, we have seen that in order to preserve God's sovereignty, his aseity, and his perfection as perfectly determined to what is most good, holy, wise, just, etc. (in other words, to himself as his original and ultimate end), Edwards denies the freedom of the causal order of creation. Instead, everything that exists, exists only in God, not merely in receiving its being from God or by participation, but in the sense of being nothing more than an expression of his own fullness.

So if it is Edwards' metaphysics rather than his doctrine that drives him to a "diminished account of creation," what metaphysical framework could rescue him from such a fate? I would suggest that the understanding of creation worked out in patristic sources and exemplified by the participatory metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas does the job, precisely by rejecting the terms on which Edwards

[618] YE23, 204. Again, this is a place where his views shifted over time, in the direction of occasionalism – recall that according to this view, God is *never* constrained by anything pre-existing because God is constantly re-creating the world, whole and entire, independently of any prior moment in time, which itself becomes quite illusory.

argued with his materialist interlocutors. In this account, being is not univocal but can be applied to God and creatures only analogically, because whereas God is being essentially, creatures can only be said to have being by participation in the divine being. And crucial to its account of primary and secondary causality is the understanding of what it means that a natural cause is secondary: not that they are simply subsequent, subordinate, or merely weaker than primary – divine – cause, but that primary and secondary causes exist on separate and non-competing ontological planes. In short, primary causation refers to God's giving existence to the entire order of secondary causation, that order of motion and change that can be explored by scientific means; being the ground of that order, it must be outside of it, so that divine creative action is neither motion nor change, and does not compete with creaturely action.

Aquinas affirms divine providence and continual creation no less than Edwards.[619] Most assuredly, things are held in existence by God: God cannot grant to any created thing the power to be sustained in existence apart from his influence.[620] Nevertheless, it is entirely possible for him to create things that truly persist over time, in the sense that the present existence can depend in a *particular* way on the antecedently existing created substance, though not *universally*. In other words, the fact that what exists presently is *this* particular created substance can be attributed to what existed previously, even though the fact that what exists presently *is* this particular created substance depends on God's continual creation – his continual giving, from nothing, of existence to what is. This is merely to distinguish between the natural order of secondary causation, which can truly be

[619] ST Ia.22, ST Ia.103-104.
[620] ST Ia.104.1.

attributed to the intrinsic nature of created entities, and God's act of primary causation, which includes the gratuitous giving of being to this order.

This distinction does not fail to serve Edwards' concern for God's glory, and yet at the same time it can affirm the reality and the glory of the creature. And here we must give the last word to John Webster, commenting on a particular passage from Thomas: "Perfect power does not absorb, exclude or overwhelm and dispossess other dependent powers and agents, but precisely the opposite: omnipotent power creates and perfects creaturely capacity and movement. Exclusive power is less than perfect, and falls short of divinity."[621]

[621] John Webster, "'Love is Also a Lover of Life': *Creatio Ex Nihilo* and Creaturely Goodness," in *God Without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology, Vol. 1* (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 112.

Chapter 4: Karl Barth's Covenantal Ontology and the Analogy of Being

The metaphysical category of participation[622] is central to the creational metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas, and the *analogia entis* has been judged as central to that notion of participation. The *analogia entis*, or analogy of being, states that creaturely being is neither identical nor entirely dissimilar to the divine being. Thus being is neither univocal nor equivocal, but the being of creatures is mysteriously analogous to God, who *is* being in himself.[623] Erich Przywara, who played a major role in recovering the *analogia entis* in the 20th century, stated that the impetus for his work was the study of Aquinas' *Quaestiones disputatae* and *De ente et essentia* during 1912-1913,[624] in which he encountered as a matter of central importance the distinction between essence and existence, and in particular the real distinction between God, for whom, uniquely, essence and existence are identical, and creatures, whose essence lies always beyond existence, such that they are characterized by a "tension-in-unity" ("*Spannungs-Einheit*") in which the being of God is by participation "in-and-beyond" their own. Creatures are thus composites of essence and existence, in contrast to the simplicity of God.

It is through the *analogia entis* that Christian theology speaks of *creatio ex nihilo* from within a Platonic participatory metaphysic, and it is central to the doctrine of creation for two reasons. First, it explains how finite being can exist at all (why

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[622] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, available at https://aquinas101.thomisticinstitute.org/st-index, accessed October 28, 2019 (hereafter ST), Ia.104.1 ad 1.
[623] John R. Betz, translator's introduction to Erich Przywara, *Analogia Entis (Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm),* trans. John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014), 43.
[624] Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, xx.

there is something rather than nothing), grounding its existence on the infinite that can give it its essence or nature, a structural relationship of participated being which is real on the side of the creature only (and not on the side of the Creator, for God is in no way composite or dependent on his creation). But secondly, it explains how finite being can exist *as finite* (how there can be many and not only one), that is, as *other* to the infinite. Proponents of the *analogia entis* would claim that without it, then, one ends up either negating the reality of the finite world or absorbing it into the infinite; either way, one has no doctrine of creation.

This is precisely the charge laid against Karl Barth by Erich Przywara and more recent commentators such as John Betz. Barth famously declared early in his *Church Dogmatics* that the *analogia entis* was the invention of the anti-christ, and the primary reason that he could never be Catholic. In particular, he observed that the *analogia entis* did not adequately express the alienation between God and man that results from sin, and worried that it reduced the incarnation to a mere part of the world, derivable and to be expected from the rest of God's creation.[625]

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[625] Keith Johnson argues in his discussion of CD II/1 that Barth consistently maintains his suspicion of adopting wholesale any metaphysics of creation, because to do so would place "the knowledge of God that humans have by virtue of their creation in continuity with the knowledge of God they have in and through God's reconciliation of sinners in Jesus Christ." In his section on the knowledge of God in CD II/1, 1-178, Barth argues "that any analogy must be extrinsic to humans—that is, it does not occur on the basis of something in the human, but rather, it happens to the human in the event of revelation." Keith Johnson, "Reconsidering Barth's Rejection of Przywara's *Analogia Entis*," *Modern Theology* 26 (2010): 644. Barth's rejection of metaphysics is one of the best-known aspects of his theology, occupying much of the first two volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*. One of his best interpreters, Hans Urs Von Balthasar, summarized Barth's concerns under four headings (see Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth,* trans. Edward T. Oakes, S.J. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 162):

1. Metaphysics makes the concept of *being* basic, and posits it as the ground of commonality between God and creature, where in fact it is the ground of the "indissoluble contrariety," because "one subject is self-positing, that is, exists *a se*. The second is other-posited and exists *ab alio*."
2. Approaching God metaphysically – that is, via "*one* ordering schema" among many possibilities, presumes that humanity has the capacity to comprehend God by "one of its own conceptual possibilities." Barth considers this irreverent and impious; as

Przywara and Betz both charge that Barth rejects analogy altogether, leaving him vacillating between contradiction and identity (that is, in dialectics), erasing either the creature or the Creator. Barth has been defended, on the other hand, by Kenneth Oakes, who claims that although Barth rejected the *analogia entis*, he nevertheless retains a robust doctrine of creation – one that can explain why there is something rather than nothing, and how creature and Creator can be truly distinct - because his notion of covenant as the interior basis for creation does essentially the same work for Reformed theology that the *analogia entis* does for Thomistic metaphysics.[626]

The purpose of this chapter is to assess and respond to Oakes' argument. I find that, on the one hand, Oakes has successfully defended Barth against some of the blunter criticisms made against him, and indicated substantial common ground between Barth and those whose doctrine of creation is grounded on a participatory metaphysic. Nevertheless, I also argue that in significant ways, the covenant does not do for Barth the metaphysical work that the analogy of being does for the Thomistic doctrine of creation. I argue that this derives largely from Barth's modern understanding of causation, in which form and intrinsic teleology play little, if any, causal role, and in which divine and human causality compete extrinsically with one another. This suggests that Barth's rejection of the *analogia*

Balthasar puts it, he holds that only "God has the right and power to express what he is and how his most perfect being is to be named."

3. The concept of being is necessarily finite, and simply to place "a negative sign" in front of it and imagine that the word "infinite" somehow refers to God "gives us a sham absolute. It is actually only the attempt to absolutize the formula for finite being and thus to project the creature into the divine."
4. Metaphysics represents disobedience on the part of sinful creatures, "because with it the sinner purports to produce something from within himself that can only come as a gift from God," i.e. God's own self-disclosure.

[626] Kenneth Oakes, "The Question of Nature and Grace in Karl Barth: Humanity as Creature and as Covenant-Partner," *Modern Theology* 23:4 (October 2007), 597-598.

entis can be traced as much to the metaphysical frame in which he worked, as to reformed convictions *per se*.

Covenant and the Metaphysical Work of the Analogy of Being

In his article, "The Question of Nature and Grace in Karl Barth: Humanity as Creature and as Covenant-Partner,"[627] Oakes defends Barth against his critics, who have read him as a "metaphysician of a 'religious theology of contradiction,' or as a kind of abstract dialectician of negation and affirmation."[628] As he writes, they "charge that Barth… maintains the doctrine of God's sole causality (*Alleinwirksamkeit*), a doctrine which can only lead to the evaporation of creation."[629] Both Przywara and, more recently, John Betz, relate these deficiencies directly to Barth's rejection of analogy. I will argue that Oakes demonstrates compellingly that these characterizations are oversimplifications; less compelling, however, is his argument that "Barth… used other doctrinal resources to express something similar"[630] to the analogy of being.

Oakes undertakes to explain the metaphysical elaboration of nature and grace that follows from Barth's characterization of creation as the external basis of the

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627 Oakes, "The Question of Nature and Grace in Karl Barth: Humanity as Creature and as Covenant-Partner," 595-616. Oakes also provides a good, concise summary of the historical background to Barth's interaction with Przywara the *analogia entis* in *Karl Barth on Theology and Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 150-154, and see also D. Stephen Long, *Saving Karl Barth: Hans Urs von Balthasar's Preoccupation* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2014) and Stephen D. Wigley, *Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Critical Engagement* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), both of whom provide particular emphasis on the role of Barth's friendship with Hans Urs von Balthasar.
628 Oakes, "The Question of Nature and Grace in Karl Barth: Humanity as Creature and as Covenant-Partner," 596.
629 Oakes, "The Question of Nature and Grace in Karl Barth: Humanity as Creature and as Covenant-Partner," 596.
630 Oakes, "The Question of Nature and Grace in Karl Barth: Humanity as Creature and as Covenant-Partner," 597.

covenant, and the covenant as the interior basis of creation. Throughout sections 44 and 45 of the *Church Dogmatics* III/2, on which Oakes focuses his attention, as Barth deals with the distinction between man as creature and man as covenant-partner, he employs the language of similarity and dissimilarity, simultaneous likeness and unlikeness. This language, as Oakes points out, is "reminiscent of the second canon of the Fourth Lateran Council... [which] became integral for Przywara's own formulation of the *analogia entis*, as Barth himself well knew. And no less than Przywara, Barth… moves from the humanity of Jesus Christ to humanity more generally precisely by making judgments of similarity and dissimilarity, likeness and unlikeness."[631] Oakes argues, with Eberhard Jüngel, that these terms "are explicitly and vigorously ontological."[632]

Barth's use of these terms, for instance, is meant emphatically to resist collapsing Creator and creature. Barth maintains a distinction between the two determinations of humanity – its creatureliness and its covenant partnership with God. Being a creature does not automatically entail covenant partnership: "humanity is a creature not created 'as' God's covenant-partner but 'to be' God's covenant-partner."[633] "The existence and being of the one loved are not identical with the fact that it is loved,"[634] writes Barth, guarding against the notion that God *necessarily* loves the creature as covenant-partner and *necessarily* brings it into being as a function of that love, much as the analogy of being does not allow for

[631] Oakes, "The Question of Nature and Grace in Karl Barth: Humanity as Creature and as Covenant-Partner," 603.
[632] Oakes, "The Question of Nature and Grace in Karl Barth: Humanity as Creature and as Covenant-Partner," 603.
[633] Oakes, "The Question of Nature and Grace in Karl Barth: Humanity as Creature and as Covenant-Partner," 608.
[634] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/1, trans. J.W. Edwards, O. Bussey, H. Knight (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), hereafter CD III/1, 97.

a cosmos that is a necessary *emanation* from God, a rejection which, as David Bentley Hart and Edward Oakes have argued, has always distinguished the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* from Platonic theories of participation.[635]

Oakes argues that for Barth, unsurprisingly, the relation between being a creature and being covenant partner flows from the relation of the two natures of Christ, which in turn flows from the "twofold yet one mission of Jesus Christ,"[636] which he describes as being simultaneously "man for God" and "man for man, for other men, His fellows."[637] Oakes claims that Barth is arguing, from the hypostatic union as grounded in the twofold mission of Christ, for similarity within dissimiliarity, with ontological ramifications. "Barth," he writes, "is attempting to couple, as did de Lubac and Przywara, the fact that we are, as creatures, always already wholly orientated towards God with the necessary complement that humanity's elevation, justification, sanctification and calling rest wholly upon the grace of God."[638]

Oakes claims, moreover, that this does not mean that Barth makes God the sole ethical agent, addressing the charge that Barth promotes the doctrine of *Alleinwirksamkeit*. Barth's discussion of faith characterizes man as simultaneously

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[635] Hart's essay in *The Analogy of Being* and Edward Oakes' book on Balthasar both provide good summaries of how the doctrine of creation was a Christian innovation over against Platonic theories of participation by emanation. David Bentley Hart, "The Destiny of Christian Metaphysics: Reflections on the *Analogia Entis*," in Thomas Joseph White, ed., *The Analogy of Being: Invention of the Antichrist or the Wisdom of God?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011), 395-410; Edward T. Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Continuum, 1994).

[636] Oakes, "The Question of Nature and Grace in Karl Barth: Humanity as Creature and as Covenant-Partner," 608.

[637] Oakes, "The Question of Nature and Grace in Karl Barth: Humanity as Creature and as Covenant-Partner," 608, citing Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/2, trans. H. Knight, G.W. Bromiley, J.K.S. Reid, R.H. Fuller (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), hereafter CD III/2, 208.

[638] Oakes, "The Question of Nature and Grace in Karl Barth: Humanity as Creature and as Covenant-Partner," 608-9.

receptive and spontaneously responsive to "the God who ensures that human life takes this particular form."[639] "Far from conceiving humans as inert and inactive pieces of furniture in the history of redemption," Oakes writes, "Barth continually stresses the importance and necessity of human action, response and obedience. With Barth's consistent emphasis upon obedient and responsible human action, it becomes difficult to maintain that he held some account of God's *Alleinwirksamkeit*."[640] Barth, moreover, directly rejected this account: "The omnicausality of God must not be construed as His sole causality," he wrote in the last volume of his *Church Dogmatics*;[641] earlier he had written that "grace would no longer be grace if its exercise consisted only in the elimination or suppression as an autonomous subject of the one to whom it was extended."[642]

Similar to Przywara's characterization of humanity as "open upwards" to God, Barth employs "openness" language in his initial analysis of the nature of creation, with ontological ramifications: "To consider humanity as essentially closed, indifferent, or opposed towards God and grace," Oakes writes, "would be to allow this contradiction to become a 'basic principle,' something which Barth clearly wishes to avoid."[643] On the contrary, Oakes argues that Barth is using the

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639 Oakes, "The Question of Nature and Grace in Karl Barth: Humanity as Creature and as Covenant-Partner," 606.
640 Oakes, "The Question of Nature and Grace in Karl Barth: Humanity as Creature and as Covenant-Partner," 606.
641 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/4, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), hereafter CD IV/4, 22.
642 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/3, trans. G.W. Bromiley, R.J. Ehrlich (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), hereafter CD III/3, 93.
643 Oakes, "The Question of Nature and Grace in Karl Barth: Humanity as Creature and as Covenant-Partner," 609, citing CD III/2, 205. Oakes also cites CD III/2, 274: "It is not by nature, but by its denial and misuse, that man is as alien and opposed to the grace of God as we see him to be in fact." This has a certain resonance to a passage from Maximus Confessor cited by Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 17. See also CD III/2, 319, and CD III/2, 402, 412-413 on natural desire for God.

language of openness and essential orientation to God, a fundamental similarity and correspondence that exists in spite of the dissimilarity between Creator and creature, and despite even the antithesis between them introduced by sin. It is a teleological account of creation, with covenant-partnership as the inner *telos* and ground of creation's being. Oakes writes that "The covenant, as creation's inner basis, is not something later layered upon a self-enclosed creation. Instead the covenant is the innermost goal, purpose, impetus, and fulfillment of creation."[644]

This means that man's creatureliness *as such* can never come into conflict with his destiny in the covenant. Covenant partnership is something that sin can destroy,[645] but it cannot destroy humanity's *orientation* to covenant-partnership; it cannot make man anything other than a creature created for covenant partnership. Sin cannot alter man's *nature*: "he exists originally *and properly* in an inner connexion and correspondence between his divine determination and his creaturely form,"[646] Barth writes. He continues, "[t]he power of sin is great, but not illimitable. It can efface or devastate many things, but not the being of man as such. … *Sin is not creative. It cannot replace the creature of God by a different reality*. It cannot, therefore, annul the covenant… *man can as little destroy or alter himself as create himself*."[647] For Barth, then, there is no alternative substantiality that man can create for himself when he turns away; when he turns away he utterly negates himself, is torn apart.[648] So the only nature he has is the one that was originally created, and grace can only perfect this nature. Barth famously rejects the

644 Oakes, "The Question of Nature and Grace in Karl Barth: Humanity as Creature and as Covenant-Partner," 601.
645 CD III/2, 205
646 CD III/2, 205, my emphasis.
647 CD III/2, 205, my emphasis.
648 CD III/2, 205.

principle that "grace does not destroy, but perfects nature," taken as an axiom, that is, taken as *presupposing* a human nature given as such which the grace given in Jesus Christ perfects. But it is the presupposition that Barth rejects. For him, the nature of humanity is given first and only in Jesus Christ; it is man's election in Christ, not an abstract *desiderium naturale,* that he rejects in turning to sin.

The Gap Between Covenant and Analogy of Being

So what do we make of this? Has Barth found a way to employ the concept of covenant to provide a metaphysical ground for a doctrine of creation, while preserving his reformed insistence on the priority of election and the centrality of justification by faith? In what follows I will argue that he has not, but that this is not necessarily due to his reformed convictions as such.

Barth writes that "[t]he gracious God is, and the creature which receives his grace is."[649] But the point of the *analogia entis* is that the word "is" is being used analogously in those two statements. God *is* as unity-in-identity, as necessary being, as the one who does not *have* but *is* being in Himself. The creature *is* as unity-in-tension, as contingent being, as participated being. I will argue that because Barth is working outside of a participatory metaphysic or the attendant understanding of causality, he can in the end only relate Creator and creature as two very different things brought and held together extrinsically, and in a way which, paradoxically, *vanquishes* rather than preserving the tension of their unity.

[649] CD III/1, 364

A simple, *prima facie* case for this argument can be made from a comparison of the succinct definitions Barth and Przywara provided for the *analogia entis*. In an essay entitled "Fate and Theology," Barth provided his (mature) definition:[650]

> 'God is' – what does that mean if not that God takes part in being? Then of course the next proposition leads to the idea that God is himself being, the origin and perfection of everything that is. In their classical form, as set forth by Thomas Aquinas, these propositions combine with a third, which can logically be regarded as their consequence, namely, everything that is as such participates in God. Everything that is exists as mere creature in greatest dissimilarity to the Creator, yet by having being it exists in greatest similarity to the Creator. That is what is meant by *analogia entis*.

Keith Johnson has shown that Barth never wavered from this characterization;[651] it is also evident from Barth's later discussion of causation; although his definition of the analogy of being does not simply posit a common genus of "being" in which God and creatures both take part, these are essentially the terms in which he characterizes (and rejects) the *analogia entis* and a hypothetical *analogia causae* and *analogia naturae* in CD III/3.[652]

But now here, on the other hand, is Przywara's concise definition of the analogy of being, found in "Polarity":

> [The human is] similar to God through the possession of a unity of essence and existence, but even in this similarity it is essentially dissimilar to God because, in God, the unity of essence and existence is that of identity, whereas in the creature the unity of essence and existence is one of tension. Now since the relation of essence and existence is the essence of 'being,' so God and the creature are in 'being' similar and dissimilar –

[650] The thrust of Johnson's research is to show that Barth never wavered from this characterization; it is also evident from Barth's discussion of causation in CD III/3, in which he characterizes (and rejects) the *analogia entis* and a hypothetical *analogia causae* and *analogia naturae* precisely in terms of species belonging to a genus.
[651] Keith Johnson, *Karl Barth and the* Analogia Entis (London: T&T Clark, 2010).
[652] CD III/3, 103.

> that is, they are analogous to one another: and this is what we mean by *analogia entis*, analogy of being.[653]

This definition makes direct use of the real distinction: divine simplicity extends to the identity of essence and existence in God (i.e. God exists essentially), whereas existence is not essential to creatures, such that they are compositions of essence and existence. As Betz writes, "[f]or Przywara… the *analogia entis*… is implied by Aquinas's doctrine of divine simplicity and his corresponding doctrine of a real distinction in creatures between essence and existence."[654]

The difference between these two articulations of the analogy of being is that the idea of tension, central to Przywara's definition, is absent from Barth's account. That tension was exactly what Barth wanted to assert, but he thought the *analogia entis* removed it by asserting a commensurability between creature and creator that "belonged" to the creature. On a purely technical level – but with substantive impact – what Barth failed to realize was that he had conflated analogy in general with analogy of attribution, in particular. Przywara had described the analogy of being as incorporating both of the traditional Aristotelian notions of analogy: analogy of attribution, a sharing in some common quality, and analogy of proportion, a "relation of mutual alterity," as Betz describes it.[655] The former describes the similarity between Creator and creature, but the analogy of being does not consist of analogy of attribution alone, such that God and His creation would be related according to their mutual sharing in some common being. For Przywara, God and creature were no less

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[653] Cited by Johnson, *Karl Barth and the* Analogia Entis, 72-73.
[654] John R. Betz, "The Beauty of the Metaphysical Imagination," in Peter M. Candler Jr. and Conor Cunningham, eds., *Belief and Metaphysics* (London: SCM Press, 2007), 51.
[655] Betz, introduction to *Analogia Entis*, 73.

related according to an analogy of proportion pointing to an ultimate *dissimilarity,*[656] because in fact the proportion is infinite.[657] Thus, Przywara concurred with Aquinas' well-known conclusion that "analogy lies between univocity and complete equivocity,"[658] suspending the analogy of being between analogy of attribution and analogy of proportion, and resting the primary emphasis on the latter, the dissimilarity.[659] Barth's reduction of the analogy of being to an analogy of attribution is one indication that he did fail to apprehend the logic of the analogy of being.

A second indicator of the substantive differences between Barth's use of the covenant and the metaphysical work done by the analogy of being is the subtle but significant difference between the way he understands the logic of analogy and the logic that Przywara drew from Lateran IV in formulating it. As we noted above, Oakes draws our attention to the fact that Barth speaks of creation using language of similarity within dissimilarity, which he does refer to specifically as "analogy."[660] But repeatedly, he orders the terms in this way: similarity within dissimilarity. Elsewhere he elaborates further on the term "analogy" as pertains to the two natures of Christ, and to humanity in Christ, writing that for all the unlikeness – between Creator and creature, between divine and human nature – there is nonetheless a likeness.[661] The emphasis here always lands first on the

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656 Betz, introduction to *Analogia Entis*, 73.
657 ST Ia.45.2.
658 ST Ia.13.5.
659 Betz, introduction to *Analogia Entis*, 74.
660 Oakes, "The Question of Nature and Grace in Karl Barth: Humanity as Creature and as Covenant-Partner," 604; CD III/2, 324.
661 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), hereafter CD IV/1, 772; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.2, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), hereafter CD IV/3.2, 533

dissimilarity, the unlikeness, *then* on the miracle that what is so far apart can be brought so near. This emphasis is stated most explicitly in Barth's discussion of causation, where he writes that "between the two subjects [that is, the divine and human as causal agents] there is neither likeness nor similarity, but utter unlikeness,"[662] later arguing that "the two subjects are together and they work together, but this fact can be understood only as the gracious mystery of an encounter in which that which is quite inconceivable and unexpected and undeserved has come to pass."[663]

The extrinsicism of this passage is clear (and an emphasis on the priority of God's action *over against* that of the creature runs throughout the *Dogmatics*),[664] but what has not been adequately noted is how this extrinsicism derives from a reversal of the logic undergirding the *analogia entis*, as Przywara found it in the Fourth Lateran Council's edict against Joachim de Fiore. That edict famously read, in part, "One cannot note any similarity between creator and creature, however great, without being compelled to observe an ever greater dissimilarity between them."[665] In Barth, the movement is from a dissimilarity, which is miraculously overcome; for Przywara, the movement runs in just the opposite direction, from a similarity that always and immediately directs one's attention to ever greater dissimilarity. Betz argues that the *analogia entis*, then, far from landing on a common ground of being between Creator and creature, always pushes beyond similarity to emphasize the infinite otherness of God – the very thing

662 CD III/3, 102.
663 CD III/3, 106.
664 CD III/3, 90-154.
665 See Betz, introduction to *Analogia Entis*, 72-73.

which Barth wanted to emphasize but which, ironically, the logic of his understanding of analogy tended to override.[666]

A third element separating Barth's use of the covenant from the metaphysical import of the analogy of being arises because Barth has not approached the question of analogy via the problem of the distinction between essence and existence that drove Przywara's inquiry into the analogy of being. Thomas regards every created being as a composition of being and a creature that has being, but this presents a problem because the creature which receives being cannot be presupposed. As Rudi te Velde writes,

> Without *esse* there is nothing, not even a receiving subject. … the receiving subject must come into being at the same time as the being that is received. … one cannot tacitly presuppose a (possible) essence in the creature, which is subsequently constituted into a relation with God as origin of being and is actualized in this respect. Creating does not simply mean the actualization of a possibility; creation denotes the origin of things according to their entire being…[667]

But it appears that Barth at points makes precisely this presupposition of the created being, even the fallen created being, as object of God's action. (Articulating this is complicated by the fact that Barth at times seems to conflate the ontological distance between creator and creature and the *moral* distance between fallen man and God; more on this below.) Barth acknowledges the tension of creaturely being, speaking of the antithesis that sin introduces, the possibility of the creature to negate itself. But, he writes, in Jesus an "effective protest" is lodged against our self-negation.[668] In him we are justified; His human

[666] Betz, "The Beauty of the Metaphysical Imagination," 53.
[667] Rudi te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Brill, 1995), 87, 91.
[668] CD III/2, 47.

nature "spares us and forbids us our own."[669] We have no human being apart from Christ; we have only that human being which is in Christ. In Christ, he writes, this antithesis "became an antithesis in unity."[670] But he speaks of that antithesis as itself something which exists essentially, something which is presupposed as being *there* as God's object. This suggests that redemption logically precedes creation for Barth: God participates in the being of the creature, "making the problem of existence His own" in Christ "before it was or could be ours,"[671] and this is the ground for creation itself (hence, covenant is the interior basis for creation). But here it appears that Barth is treating the problem of our existence as an autonomous thing, as though contingency itself were somehow standing outside God, and God has extrinsically bound to Himself the possibility of self-negation in order to negate it and affirm man as His covenant partner. In effect, Barth treats "unity-in-tension" as itself something that *is* essentially, so that the essence and existence of "unity-in-tension" are themselves related to one another as "unity-in-identity". This results in a "necessary contingency." This is where Barth's metaphysical extrinsicism is most clear, and most damaging.

Barth, in subordinating creation to reconciliation, winds up speaking of created being as though it had its own autonomous existence, and could be approached from the outside as the self-subsisting object of God's action. Thomas, as te Velde explains, would insist that when God creates that which is not God, he *gives* existence to contingent being. God does not make the problem of existence

669 CD III/2, 47.
670 CD III/3, 106.
671 CD III/1, 380.

His own in creation; He *gives* the problem of existence, where there was none. He *gives* unity-in-tension. In Christ, he creates, so in Christ, He gives the participation of the creature in the being of the Creator.

Explaining Barth's Divergence from the Analogy of Being

In the remainder of this chapter I want to make two suggestions concerning *why* Barth cannot allow covenant to play the metaphysical role of the analogy of being. First, he has too closely correlated the order of knowing and the order of being, allowing his insistence that Christ alone can be the source of revelation to flow into an argument that reconciliation in Christ is the only ground of created being. Second, in his discussion of causation in CD III/3, he characterizes human and divine causation as being in competition with one another within a metaphysical framework that resonates most strongly with efficient, rather than formal or final, causality, and when he does speak of teleology he expresses it in decidedly extrinsic terms.

❖ Order of Knowing and Order of Being

Barth, as is well known, regarded the *analogia entis* as the touchstone of a natural theology that he rejected. For Barth, God only reveals Himself through Himself; Christ alone is the revelation of God.[672] Johnson argues that for Barth, "[n]othing else, be it human reason, consciousness, nature, or history, can serve as a source of revelation."[673] This entails that the even a covenant-directedness of human

[672] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), hereafter CD I/1, 296.
[673] Johnson, *Karl Barth and the* Analogia Entis, 74, 104-5.

consciousness and nature cannot suffice to make them a source of revelation. Indeed, there can finally be no continuity between what man can know of God from creation and what is revealed in Christ; here, Barth greatly intensifies the classical Reformed position (held by Calvin, for instance) that the Book of Nature can only rightly be read through the Book of Scripture (e.g. through God's revelation of Jesus Christ as mediated by Scripture, illuminated by the Spirit).[674] Barth later indicates that only the Word and Spirit can tell man that he is created for God. "It thus follows that natural theology cannot find here a point of contact for the proclamation of the grace and revelation of God. … It does not tell him that God is with him and for him… This is something that man cannot tell himself. He cannot even prepare himself to receive it."[675]

Keith Johnson writes that

> Barth believes that divine revelation centers upon Jesus Christ and is governed by him at every moment. Przywara's understanding of divine revelation, however, encompasses and connects both God's act in creation *and* God's act in Jesus Christ. For Barth, this view of revelation is too broad. If Przywara's view were correct, Barth argues, God's act of grace in Christ could be seen as reinforcing or completing knowledge already available to humans by virtue of their creation, as if such knowledge were 'given to us in the givenness of history.' If this were the case, 'God could not be distinguished from a hidden feature of reality as such.' Instead, he insists, revelation must be seen as 'a revealing' – a new, unique, and specific event where God is the sole actor and over which God has sole control.[676]

The responses Przywara wrote in the 1940s to Barth's criticisms indicate that this is a partial misreading. On the one hand, he stands by the Roman Catholic

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[674] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles. In *The Library of Christian Classics*, edited by John T. McNeill, Vols. XX-XXI (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), hereafter *Institutes*, I.vi.
[675] CD III/2, 321-2.
[676] Johnson, "Reconsidering Barth's Rejection of Przywara's *Analogia Entis*," 640.

position that there is revelation to be found in creation, while maintaining that there need be no contradiction between the general revelation to be found in creation and the unique, and uniquely full, revelation to be found in Christ. But on the other, he completely rejects the idea that the analogy of being means that the incarnation could be derived from creation, reducing Jesus Christ to a part of that creation; on the contrary, he argued, as the analogy of being is only an analogy (with its emphasis, again, on the dissimilarity between God and creation), so creation is only an indirect revelation, even without the obscuring effects of sin.[677]

More significantly, for Barth, the insistence that revelation is to be found in Christ alone follows directly to an order of being in which creation is not only *ordered to*, but actually *presupposes*, the incarnation. For Przywara, revelation is assuredly by Christ, but what Christ, as the true human, reveals, is humanity *as it has always been*, its true nature and end.[678] For Barth, it is precisely the reverse: there is no act of creation to consider apart from its internal basis in the covenant, which in turn cannot be considered apart from Christ's election and humanity's election in Jesus Christ, which determines human nature. "The reason why God created this world of heaven and earth, and why the future world will be a new heaven and a new earth, is that God's eternal Son and Logos did not will to be an angel or animal but a man, and that this and this alone was the content of the eternal divine election of grace."[679] It is as though, for Barth, it's

[677] Betz, introduction to *Analogia Entis*, 106, 110.
[678] Akin to Milbank and Pickstock's identification of Christ as "the arrival of the goal in the midst of the way [that] reveals again the way…" John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2001), 61.
[679] CD III/1, 18.

not so much that the world was created so that Jesus could be born, but rather that the birth of Christ is the ground of creation.

Oliver O'Donovan assesses Barth in the same way, approving of his epistemological positions but finding fault with his failure to properly distinguish the order of knowing from the order of being.[680] O'Donovan laments the "unacceptably polarized choice between an ethic that is revealed and has no ontological grounding and an ethic that is based on creation and so is naturally known."[681] The point is that we may allow that we can only know the true meaning of the created order in the resurrection of Christ, but this is true precisely because in that resurrection God affirms what He first *made*.[682] If with Barth we say that only "subsequently can the proclamation of the grace and revelation of God draw [man's] attention to the fact that it cannot be anything strange or unnatural for him to be called and set in covenant with God and gathered to the people of God,"[683] we can nonetheless say that what is thus revealed is something about the intrinsic nature of creation as such.

The collapse of knowing and being is related to an interesting tendency in Barth to collapse *moral* arguments and ontological ones, as he was unable to speak of creation apart from reconciliation. Przywara drew a distinction between a *moral* gap that separated humanity from God and an *ontological* gap. The *analogia entis*

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680 Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 85-87, and see also Webster, "'Love is Also a Lover of Life': *Creatio Ex Nihilo* and Creaturely Goodness," in *God Without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology, Vol. 1* (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 101-102.
681 O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 19.
682 Von Balthasar similarly approves of this distinction within the order of knowing in Von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth,* 162-163.
683 CD III/2, 322.

implies that sin neither introduces the ontological dissimilarity, nor destroys the ontological similarity, between God and man: this is given from creation in that the being of God and man are related analogically, not equivocally or univocally, because the being of the creature is characterized by essence and existence united in tension and the being of God is characterized by essence and existence united in identity. On the other hand, sin is the reason for the moral gap that lies between God and man: "Of course," Betz writes in his introduction to *Analogia Entis*,

> the dimensions of the analogy of being are considerably altered in light of sin on the one hand, and redemption, on the other. … For, on the one hand, to the degree that creation is in bondage to sin, to that same degree it is *unlike* God and *alienated* from God (even if sin, being a privation, is never able to utterly destroy creation and obliterate the analogy of being). On the other hand, when creation is finally glorified in the saints, who are 'like' Christ (1 John 3:20), creation will reveal a far *greater* likeness than a sinful humanity looking in the dark mirror of the present world can imagine (though even so great a likeness does not negate the *analogia entis* and the interval between the Creator and the creature).[684]

For Barth, the moral and ontological appear to be more collapsed. Man, by virtue of turning away from God, is *ontologically* opposed to him.[685] For this reason grace must replace what remains of nature (which is really nothing at all). "Barth's account of being a creature relies heavily upon descriptions of humanity's being called, addressed, and summoned by God, all of which follow from humanity's election in Jesus Christ."[686] Barth, with Calvin, holds that creation cannot reveal God to fallen man, certainly not as anything more than a menace. But the antithesis itself implies an intrinsic human nature that man in rebellion turns

[684] Betz, introduction to *Analogia Entis*, n.120.
[685] CD III/2, 205.
[686] Oakes, "The Question of Nature and Grace in Karl Barth: Humanity as Creature and as Covenant-Partner," 600.

against, and this in turn requires a distinction to be made between the moral and the ontological, or between reconciliation and creation. Barth's doctrine of creation pushes against this distinction.

❖ Causality

This leads directly to the primary metaphysical obstacle to Barth's theology of the covenant doing the work of the analogy of being, which is that his account of causality is worked out from within a rather modern frame, in which divine and creaturely causation are implicitly put in competition with one another and formal and final causality in creation are conceived of as *extrinsic* to the creature. Barth largely works this out in section 49.2 of CD III/3, entitled "The Divine Accompanying," and particularly in the section introducing the concept of causality and querying whether and how it can be useful to Christian theology at all.[687]

A distinction between God as primary cause and creaturely, secondary causation is universal to Christian thought; Thomas worked out his own account in his commentary on the Neoplatonic work *Liber de Causis*. But in the Thomistic account, divine and creaturely causation do not compete with one another. Rather, God is the basis of all causation, such that secondary causes participate in divine primary causation.[688] A second crucial aspect of Thomistic metaphysics is the notion of final and formal causality. All created beings are created *for the sake*

[687] CD III/3, 94-107.
[688] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, trans. Vincent A Guagliardo, O.P., Charles R. Hess, O.P., and Richard C. Taylor (Washington, D.C., The Catholic University Press of America, 1996), 132.

of some end, to which they are, *as created*, intrinsically ordered; this end is their final cause.[689] Likewise, they are created *with regard to* some form, and this is again intrinsic to their nature as created, not extrinsically imposed – there is no formless matter, no "what" that is not a particular "this" or "that."[690]

In the early modern period both of these aspects of causality came under attack, as is well known, as the idea of a quasi-autonomous realm of pure nature, upon which the supernatural could impinge, arose, and the causal power of form and end gave way to efficient force.[691] Barth's account of causation is of a piece with these modern conceptions, although again, the reasons why are subtle, for while Barth does not merely set divine and creaturely causation alongside one another, he cannot avoid setting them in competition with one another, nor making formal and final causation phenomena extrinsic to the creature.

"It is ostensibly a question of the relation between the divine activity and the creaturely," Barth writes as he introduces his discussion of causation. "But activity means *causare*. Activity is movement or action which has as its aim or object a specific effect. To act means to bring about an effect. The subject of such *causare* is a *causa*, in English, a 'cause,' something without which another and second thing either would not be at all, or

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689 ST Ia.44.4.

690 Gregory Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 6. See also John Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 117, and Rudi te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aauinas*, 167, on how ends and form have *causal* power.

691 See, among others, the accounts in Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986), Louis Dupre, *Passage to Modernity* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1993), and Peter Harrison, *The Territories of Science and Religion* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

would not be at this particular point or in this particular way."[692] Barth then immediately provides a robust discussion of how divine and creaturely causation differ from one another according to the distinction between primary and secondary causation. God is "the source of all *causae*, the basis and starting-point of the whole causal series… all *causae* outside Him and their *causare*… are not merely conditioned but in the first instance posited by Him, seeing that they are created. All other *causae* can only affirm and attest Him as the one *causa*."[693] Barth's description of what it means for creatures to be secondary causes is elucidating, even as it already begins to point to differences between his understanding of primary and secondary causation and that of Thomas:

> The creature is also *causa*. But the peculiarity of the creature as *causa* consists primarily in the fact that as *causa* it is posited absolutely by God. Without God it would not be at all, and it would not be *causa*. Its *causare* can only be a participation in the divine *causare*… Not only does it work under God but it also works in connexion with a creaturely series of causes in which it is itself something which is effected by other creatures. As *causa causans* it is therefore *causa causata* in this twofold sense. And that is why it is called *causa secunda*, a *causa* of the second order, of the order to which the whole reality of heaven and earth which is distinct from God belongs, or *causa particularis*, one cause amongst many others, and as such a cause which has only a limited share in the full force of the concept *causa*.[694]

That creatures are caused causes, given existence ("posited," as Barth puts it), is fully in line with Thomas' understanding of secondary causation (which, as we have already observed, runs more or less

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[692] CD III/3, 98.
[693] CD III/3, 98-99.
[694] CD III/3, 99.

unchallenged into the standard reformed understanding of providence found in reformed orthodoxy and the Westminster Standards). But two observations are in order. First, that secondary causation, or causation "of the second order" is for Barth a matter of being affected by other creaturely causes. This is indeed true of creaturely causes, but this is not why Thomas referred to them as secondary causes; for Thomas, it was enough that all creatures are by definition compositions of potency and act and therefore require a cause for their very existence and being as causes. And second, the comment that secondary causes have only "a limited share in the full force of the concept *causa*" appears to set creaturely and divine causation alongside one another on a spectrum. Barth will later reject this, and so it is probably best to read this comment simply as a restatement of his earlier point that creaturely "*causare* can only be a participation in the divine *causare.*"

Unfortunately, Barth does not entirely avoid pairing creaturely and divine causation as opposing terms, for it is at this point that Barth unintentionally moves toward a modern, extrinsic conception of causality. Barth is not sanguine about the introduction of the concept of causation into theology, particularly with respect to the doctrine of providence.[695]

[695] He prefers to speak of the "divine accompanying," as he titled section 49.2 of CD III/3, a term that he uses as early as the second volume of the *Church Dogmatics*, speaking of God "conceding to this existence a reality side by side with His own, and fulfilling His will towards this other in such a way that He does not suspend and destroy it as the other but accompanies and sustains it and allows it to develop in freedom." Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), hereafter CD II/1, 410. Tanner, citing Barth, notes that "[t]he existence of this genuine created causal efficacy must be said… to follow only from the direct founding agency of God for it. 'It is not of itself,' Barth says, 'that it can exist and work side by side with Him; it is always… the gift of God.'" Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1988), 91, citing CD III/3, 93.

He warns that the concept can miss, and, he believes, historically has "missed completely the relationship between creation and the covenant of grace,"[696] speaking of an abstract God exercising abstract control over "a neutral and featureless creature. … And the result was that when the dogmaticians came to speak of the *causare* of the *causa prima* and the *causae secundae*, neither in the one case nor in the other had it any specifically Christian content."[697] As Webster notes, "the identities of the agents in the history of providence – this God and his creatures – are fundamental to determining its course and character."[698]

Barth lays out five conditions that the use of the concept of causation must meet in Christian theology, with the fifth being most important such that "the fulfilment of all of them is dependent upon the fulfilment" of the last. First, causation must allow for contingency.[699] Second, "care must be taken lest the idea should creep in that in God and the creature we have to do with two 'things,'"[700] lest we begin to imagine causes – including God – as things lying under our control.[701]

Third, Barth insists that we must not set divine and creaturely causation alongside one another as though they were species of causes belonging to

[696] CD III/3, 100.
[697] CD III/3, 100.
[698] John Webster, "On the Theology of Providence," in *God Without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology, Vol. 1* (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 131.
[699] CD III/3, 101.
[700] CD III/3, 101-102.
[701] He worries that Thomas' conception of causality leans in this direction.

a single genus.[702] God is *causa sui*,[703] the uncaused cause and the cause of all other causes.[704] Barth repeatedly draws the distinction between creaturely causation which *conditions* what already exists, but which is likewise *conditioned by* divine causation, which is an absolutely free and unconditioned *positing* of what exists.[705] And this means, he writes, that

> the divine work is not merely done after a higher and superior fashion, but within a completely different order. … [T]here is no room for those conceptions of God's operation which are no more than the ascribing to it of a higher potency as compared with the lower potency of that of the creature. … For that is how stronger creatures work on other and weaker creatures. But the work of God on the creature is far more than comparatively a stronger or superlatively the strongest work.[706]

Fourth, when put to use in Christian theology the concept of cause must never be abstracted from Christian content; theologians must never forget that they are speaking of *this* God who has created and loved *this* creation in Christ.[707]

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[702] CD III/3, 102-103. One of his complaints against Thomas is that he made precisely this mistake by failing to safeguard the distinction between divine and human causation. CD III/3, 103-4.
[703] CD III/3, 98.
[704] CD III/3, 99, 102. Here Barth continues to elaborate on the distinction between primary and secondary causation. "The divine *causa*, as distinct from the creaturely, is self-grounded, self-positing, self-conditioning and self-causing. … [On the other hand,] the creaturely *causa* is not grounded in itself but absolutely from outside and therefore not at all within itself. It owes the fact that it is is a *causa*, and is capable of *causare*, not to itself but first of all to God, who created it and as the Creator still posits and conditions it, and then to the other *causae* of its own order, without whose conditioning or partial conditioning it would not exist." CD III/3, 103. Note that here the reference to the cause of second causes lying outside itself is not an indicator of extrinsicism, but merely a way of stating the dependence of secondary causes.
[705] CD III/3, 99, 135.
[706] CD III/3, 135-136. This comment comes in the context of Barth's discussion of the *concursus* of divine and creaturely causes, which Tanner characterizes as adhering to the rule that "God's creative agency must be said to found a created cause in the very operations by which it proves sufficient to produce an effect within the created order." Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology,* 92. "In the rule of God we do not have to do first with a creaturely action and then – somewhere above or behind, but quite distinct from it, like a hidden meaning and content – with an operation of God Himself. To describe *concursus divinis* we cannot use the mathematical picture of two parallel lines. But creaturely events take place as God Himself acts." CD III/1, 133.
[707] CD III/3, 104.

It is with his fifth condition – the one in which Barth believes the other four are all fulfilled – that Barth is unable to avoid putting divine and creaturely causation in competition with one another, and provides the strongest evidence to his critics who charge him with an assertion of divine *Alleinwirksamkeit* (sole causality, not just omnicausality). "If the causal concept is to be applied legitimately," he writes, "its content and interpretation must be determined by the fact that what it describes is the operation of the Father of Jesus Christ in relation to that of the creature."[708] Elaborating on this, he continues,

> [God] takes [the creature] to Himself as such and in general in such sort that He co-operates with it, preceding, accompanying and following all its being and activity, so that all the activity of the creature is primarily and simultaneously and subsequently His own activity, and therefore a part of the actualization of His own will revealed and triumphant in Jesus Christ.[709]

Barth consistently speaks in terms of God's lordship, or mastery, over the activity of the creature in terms of determination and displacement: "His activity determines our activity even to its most intimate depths, even to its most direct origins. It means that always and in all circumstances our activity is under His decision. It means that He rules over us as He foreordained over us…".[710] Barth writes that "as *causa prima* [God] precedes and accompanies and follows the *causae secundae*. Therefore His *causare* consists, and consists only, in the fact He *bends their activity* to the execution of His own will which is His will of grace, *subordinating their operations* to the specific operation which constitutes the history of the

[708] CD III/3, 105.
[709] CD III/3, 105.
[710] CD III/3, 132.

covenant of grace."[711] Here Barth has departed from the traditional understanding of primary causation giving being to a secondary order of causation, drawing God's causal power into the natural order of causation as a superior force, rather than as the transcendent creator and governor of all.[712]

In a discussion of the Thomistic understanding of secondary causes, John Webster writes that what "Aquinas commends… - something which Barth also reached towards in his theology of covenant and of God's evocation of active human partners – is that the plenitude of God apart from creatures does not entail the thought of God's segregation as sole cause, but rather the opposite: God's perfection is seen also in bringing into being other agents."[713] But he has also written elsewhere, in terms apt to describe Barth's overarching concerns and his approach to creation and covenant in particular,[714] that when

> treatment of the *opera Dei externae* [are] so structured that the *opus gratiae* has precedence over the *opus naturae*, of which it is the 'inner ground'… [the] resultant conceptions of Christian doctrine… [may present] the relation of God and creatures as one between divine and human persons who, for all their differences, are strangely commensurable, engaging one another in the same space, deciding, acting, and interacting in the world as a commonly-inhabited field of reality.[715]

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[711] CD III/3, 105, my emphasis.
[712] Notably, it is at this point that Barth seems to run afoul of the limits Tanner suggests for speaking of the relationship between primary and secondary, divine and creaturely, causation, "prohibitions [which] extend to talk about the influence of divine agency as any sort of *working on* created operations already in act. … God does not work on created beings already inclined in a direction contrary to the divine will in order to reorient them." Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology,* 95. This rule does not seem compatible with talk of God *bending* the activity of creatures to his will. Tanner goes on to speak of God "working interiorly, in [the creature's] depths"; but Barth's language at this point has decisively shifted in the direction of the extrinsic.
[713] John Webster, "Love is Also a Lover of Life," 112.
[714] Recall that he refers to creation as the "exterior basis" of the covenant and covenant as the "interior basis" of creation.
[715] John Webster, "*Non Ex Aequo*: God's Relation to Creatures," in *God Without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology, Vol. 1* (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 118. He continues, "It is,

Undoubtedly Barth has a strong view of humanity's partnership with God, and humanity's union with God in Christ. He writes that "[w]hat constitutes the being of man… is not a oneness of being but a genuine togetherness of being with God." But he immediately notes that the "being of man in all its independence and particularity, in all its difference from the being of God, is the being which is acted upon in this action of God, ruled in this rule of God and drawn into this history inaugurated and controlled by God."[716] This gives a good sense for why Przywara saw theopanism in Barth: the "togetherness" Barth writes of takes on the flavor of two foreign (but autonomous) substances being brought together, external to one another, the one acting upon the other from the outside. This effectively forecloses any robust notion of creaturely freedom, although this is a claim that Barth disavows. Like Thomas, Barth argues that "God is not exalted in the suppression of the creature."[717] But it remains the case

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however, possible to exhibit Christian doctrine in a different arrangement, with differences of proportion and placement as well as of material content. Such a reordering entails no diminishment of the importance of the work of grace… [but] it presents a conception of Christian teaching in which the *non ex aequo* character of the relation of God and creatures can be seen as fitting ot the natures of both and to the unrestricted intimacy of God's presence in the world." Webster, "*Non Ex Aequo*, 119. It was this sort of arrangement – with the doctrine of creation worked out before and as basis for the doctrine of reconciliation – that characterized the church fathers that Aquinas and Calvin drew from. See Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003), 136-161; and J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th. ed. (London: Continuum, 1977), 83-86.

[716] CD III/2, 141.

[717] CD III/3, 130; Barth follows this statement by once again denying that holds to the notion that God is the sole causal agent: "He does not work alone even when he works in all." See also St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, ed. Joseph Kenny, O.P., available at http://dhspriory.org/thomas/ContraGentiles.htm, accessed January 29, 2016 (hereafter SCG), III.69 and Webster, "Love is Also a Lover of Life," 111-112. "Because God can be opposed by nothing – because, again, he is not a particular being acting upon others and acted upon by them – he is beyond envy of the creature, and there is him [*sic*] no reluctance to bestow upon the creature its own intrinsic substance and powers." Webster, *"Non Ex Aequo*," 126. Tanner find that for both Aquinas and Barth, the creature becomes what it is not in separation from God, but only in intimate relationship: "talk of the creature's stature does not take away from God's but magnifies it. … Created power and efficacy just become cases of created being existing in a total and immediate dependence upon the God who brings it to be." Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 85. Later in the *Church Dogmatics* Barth will work this account through the person of Christ in the doctrine of reconciliation: "It is at once apparent that the formula 'God everything and man nothing'… is… pure nonsense… In the giving of His Son… God is indeed everything but only in order that man may not be nothing, in order that he may be His man, in

for Barth that where we would negate ourselves, Christ effectively protests, forbidding us our own self-negated being, and thus humanity is justified. This is what O'Donovan is referring to when he refers to Barth's "frankly Apollinarian Christological conceptions."[718]

Barth maintains that this does not efface the freedom of the creature, but this is because for Barth, the freedom of the creature is *only* safeguarded by being overruled by God: "The rights of the creature are most radically known and acknowledged – indeed they are only really known and acknowledged – when the rights of God over against it are fully and unreservedly acknowledged,"[719] he writes. "The creature cannot ask for itself anything better than to be ruled absolutely by the divine activity of grace."[720] These claims are driven entirely by Barth's desire to conceive of creation and all of God's works as a matter of "praise rather than expectation"[721], and base his argumentation upon the character of *this* God, this one revealed in Christ, rather than on mere philosophical concepts.[722] But again we see that Barth is situating ontological claims within moral ones, and creation within reconciliation.

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order that as such he, too, may be everything in his own place, on his own level and within his own limits." Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), hereafter CD IV/1, 89.

[718] O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 87.

[719] CD III/3, 147.

[720] CD III/3, 149.

[721] See John Webster, "Perfection and Participation," in *The Analogy of Being: Invention of the Antichrist or the Wisdom of God?* edited by Thomas Joseph White, O.P. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011).

[722] CD III/3, 130, 146. When Barth faults Calvin, Zwingli, and the later reformed orthodox for raising up a specter of the sovereign God as a creature-negating tyrant, he traces their failings to their adoption of philosophical character that "missed completely the relationship between creation and the covenant of grace." CD III/3, 100, 115-116.

Recall that Barth argues that the creature is free to negate itself, but not to change its nature, not to change that for which it was made or that with regard to which it was made.[723] Barth fails to recognize the implicit metaphysic of final and formal causality in this statement: sin is not creative precisely because of the *causal* role of the teleological ordering of humanity and the form, in Christ, with regard to which mankind is created. But where final and formal causation play a role for Barth, it is an *extrinsic* rather than *intrinsic* teleology that is at work. Although for Barth the covenant supplies a teleological grounding for what the creature is – the inner basis of creation – and although the creature's end is not subsequently added to a pre-existing creature, it is nonetheless an orientation that is applied to the creature extrinsically. To be the covenant partners of God, Barth writes,

> is the determination under which we are created and exist. This is the particular plan and will of God operative and executed in our creation. This is the gracious meaning of our existence and nature. *But it is not a human attribute.* It does not belong to us in virtue of the fact that as men we are the creatures of God. We are not created the covenant-partners of God, but to be His covenant-partners, to be His partners in the history which is the goal of His creation and in which His work as Creator finds its continuation and fulfillment. That this is achieved, that we fulfill this determination, that this history is in train and moves steadily to its goal, is a matter of the free grace with which God deals in sovereignty with His creature, of the Word and Spirit with which He has intercourse with His creature, of His good-pleasure which we cannot control but must always acknowledge that we do not deserve.[724]

What Barth is determined to avoid is the assertion that our nature as creatures created to be the covenant partners of God and find our true end in him is something that belongs to us or on which we have an autonomous claim: it is all

[723] CD III/2, 205.
[724] CD III/2, 320, my emphasis.

grace. But this is already safeguarded by a doctrine of creation that understands the analogy of being. Our very existence is gift, not belonging to our essence – "not a human attribute"! And likewise, all of the attributes that characterize our nature are given by the gratuitous act of divine plenitude and love that is creation. "What do you have that you did not receive?"[725]

As Thomas, as well as Henri de Lubac, have it, *what* we are and *how we are orientated* is given not extrinsically, but intrinsically, in and with our very creation. To be sure, Aquinas recognized that the natural desire of the soul for God indicated an orientation of human nature to an end "out of all proportion" to itself – and yet, paradoxically, in creation God's gift of this end *and* of the intrinsic capacity to receive it is constitutive of human nature.[726] And this means that we can have our human being, as given, in its own integrity as created and as *restored* rather than *replaced* in redemption, because our end is truly intrinsic; our orientation is an essential attribute of the human: to be human is to be created for God, to glorify him and enjoy him forever. Note that in this case we can still talk about reformed concerns such as the gift of redemption, about justification by faith, and about God's sovereignty, without negating the creature – but not, I suspect, without being more comfortable with paradox than Barth tends to allow.

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[725] 1 Corinthias 4:7, NRSV.

[726] *De veritate* q.14 a.2 *resp.* Johnson discusses this: see *Karl Barth and the* Analogia Entis and Keith L. Johnson, "Reconsidering Barth's Rejection of Przywara's *Analogia Entis*," *Modern Theology* 26 (2010), 640. Oakes points out that Barth does discuss man's desire for God, and indeed characterizes it as constitutive of human nature. Oakes, "The Question of Nature and Grace in Karl Barth: Humanity as Creature and as Covenant-Partner," 611. It is, however, not a desire that exists separately from humanity's election in Christ, who is man for God and God for man. CD III/2, 412-3. As such, it is not an intrinsic attribute of humanity, but a desire and an orientation that is given extrinsically to the human.

Form and the Analogia Relationis

Interestingly, there is an attenuated conception of form present in Barth's *analogia relationis*. "There is freedom in God, but no caprice,"[727] he writes, and this will partially shield him from the charge of arbitrary voluntarism. While Barth denies any *analogia entis*, he allows for the *analogia relationis*, an analogy by which there is both real difference and real likeness between the relationship between Father and Son and that between God and man. Likeness, because "the freedom in which God posits Himself as the Father, is posited by Himself as the Son and confirms Himself as the Holy Ghost, is the same freedom as that in which He is the Creator of man, in which man may be His creature, and in which the Creator-creature relationship is established by the Creator… [and] the eternal love in which god as the Father loves the Son, and as the Son loves the Father, and in which God as the Father is loved by the Son and as the Son by the Father, is also the love which is addressed by God to man."[728] But difference because in it "we have to do with God and man rather than God and God."

The *analogia relationis* echoes the shape of *form* – that "in which regards to which" humanity is created – for two reasons. First, it is presented as the answer to "the question of the inner relationship between the determination of man as the covenant-partner of God on the one side and his creaturely and cosmic nature, on the other…"[729] – in other words, Barth is here dealing with the question of how to understand how man is, in his nature, fit for the end intended for him by his Creator. Second, this is presented as something grounded not in an arbitrary

[727] CD III/2, 218.
[728] CD III/2, 220.
[729] CD III/2, 221.

divine fiat, but in the eternal intra-trinitarian relations: "not… in a purely factual and perhaps accidental parallelism, or on the basis of a capricious divine resolve, but it follows the essence, the inner being of God."[730] "God repeats in this relationship *ad extra* a relationship proper to Himself in His inner divine essence. … And it is this relationship in the inner divine being which is repeated and reflected in God's eternal covenant with man as revealed and operative in time in the humanity of Jesus."[731] Barth describes this as the "ontological character, the reality and the radical nature of the being of Jesus for His fellow-men."[732] Not divine *fiat*, but the repetition of the inner relationship of the triune God in Christ, grounds the relationship between what man is in his human nature and his determination as God's covenant partner:

> We have given a first answer to this question in relation to the man Jesus. The answer is that the inner relationship in this man is a relationship of clear agreement because His humanity, in correspondence and similarity with His determination for God and therefore with God Himself, as God's image, consists in the fact that, as He is for God, He is also for man, for His fellows.[733]

One of the steps in Balthasar's argument that Barth's *analogia fidei* presupposes an *analogia entis* is to recognize the implicit formal-cause shape of the *analogia relationis*, but then to generalize it to cover ontological concepts extending beyond relationships. And indeed, if Barth were intending to introduce a notion of formal causality here, such a generalization would be warranted and Barth truly would be moving toward the *analogia entis*, as Balthasar believed he was. But in fact, Barth explicitly disavows this move, claiming that the *analogia relationis* "is

730 CD III/2, 220.
731 CD III/2, 219.
732 CD III/2, 219.
733 CD III/2, 221-222.

not a correspondence and similarity of being, an *analogia entis*. The being of God cannot be compared with that of man. But it is not a question of this two-fold being. It is a question of the relationship within the being of God on the one side and between the being of God and that of man on the other."[734] Barth's aim in introducing the *analogia relationis* at this point in the *Church Dogmatics* is not to ground creaturely being as such, but to examine the relationship between God and man, to ask "how far man's humanity may in all circumstances [even in the context of sinful humanity] be a sign of his divine determination."[735] But for the purposes of this examination, creaturely being as such is taken as given. And so the notion of form implicit in the *analogia relationis* does not provide Barth with any more of a metaphysical ground for a doctrine of creation than does his use of the concept of covenant.

Faith and Metaphysics

The core of reformed theology, in Barth as elsewhere, is justification by grace, through faith. The final conclusion of Barth's discussion of causality in CD III/3 is not a metaphysical precept, but the specificity of what is revealed of how God has disposed His causal power, as revealed in Christ.[736] Barth's emphasis, throughout his discussion of man as creature and as covenant-partner, is always on God's faithfulness to that covenant – not its metaphysical deliverances.

> Man is orientated towards that for which he is determined. Even when he sins, he can deny and conceal but he cannot remove or destroy the fact that he is orientated in this way. … He can trifle with the grace of God, but he cannot make himself wholly unworthy to be in covenant with

[734] CD III/2, 220.
[735] CD III/2, 221.
[736] CD III/3, 142.

> God. … *God is faithful. God acknowledges and confesses Himself the Creator by reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, in the One for whom and with a view to whom He created it. He thus proves true that which we contested but which did not in any way cease to be the truth because we did so*, but was always the truth even in the form of our lie, namely, that our orientation is to be the covenant-partners of God.[737]

In this chapter I have argued, contrary to Oakes, that Barth's use of covenant does not provide him with the metaphysical ground necessary to a doctrine of creation. I have also argued, however, that this is driven not by Barth's reformed convictions, but by his modern understanding of causality. The purpose of this thesis has been to show that Thomas' metaphysics of creation can find a home in reformed theology (and vice versa), but we have suggested that there is recovery work to be done – of the doctrine of creation, of a participatory ontology, and perhaps most importantly the doctrine of the perfectly simple Creator.

[737] CD III/2, 322, emphasis mine.

Conclusion

This thesis has claimed that theology must never forget that it treats of God and of all things in relation to God, even as it moves away from its center to interrogate its various doctrinal topics. In particular, we have argued that in order for reformed theology to provide a coherent account of justification by faith and the providence of God, it must locate, and it is well served to locate, these topics within a framework controlled by a robust account of the distributed doctrine which is creation. And furthermore, the doctrine of creation that is sufficiently robust will be one that is itself located within a doctrine of God that affirms the classical perfections of the triune God, especially his simplicity. We have argued that the Thomas Aquinas' metaphysics of creation provide such a foundation, and have sought to show the extent to which various reformed figures have met with success in providing a coherent account of salvation and the relationship between divine and human action as a function of their adoption of his account.

In the absence of the real distinction found in Thomas, we have shown, God is treated as one extrinsic cause among many – a very large and powerful one, to be sure, but nevertheless not radically different from his creatures. "The difference between creator and creature is infinite, not just 'very great'; 'creator' does not merely refer to the supreme causal power by which the world is explained, for God would then be simply a 'principle superior to the world',[738] or 'the biggest

[738] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/1, trans. J.W. Edwards, O. Bussey, H. Knight (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), hereafter CD III/1, 12.

thing around'.[739] Such conceptions falter by making God one term in a relation and so only comparatively, not absolutely, different."[740] And as a direct consequence of this move, if God's sovereignty is to be maintained, it can only be at the expense of the freedom and agency of the creature, such that the grace of God is seen to destroy and displace, rather than restore, created human nature.

Tanner writes that "[i]f human action under grace remains that appropriate to a human being, God's grace must be received and accommodated to that nature to produce a new internal principle for action."[741] She argues that in a theology more directly focused on creation, "[t]he transformative effects of God's grace are assumed to include genuine created dispositions for good works under God's direction; in this way the account of our salvation accords with the doctrine of creation in which divine agency is said to establish created beings in the created powers whereby they exercise their own operations and efficacy."[742] Tanner presents this as one option for faithful theological exposition, leaving more space for theology without a robust doctrine of creation at its core,[743] but it could also be read as an argument in favor of solidly establishing the doctrine of creation in our minds, so that when we argue that grace restores nature, we have before us a sense of the nature that it restores, and a due sense that that nature is established only by God's creative act, that it is restored only in his act of redemption, and

[739] David Burrell, *Faith and Freedom: An Interfaith Perspective* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 5.
[740] John Webster, "Trinity and Creation," in *God Without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology, Vol. 1* (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 90-91.
[741] Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1988), 108.
[742] Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 112, referring in particular to Thomas.
[743] She refers to these as uses of the "negative" side of her rules for speech about divine and human action, which emphasize the impotence of the creature relative to the sovereignty of God.

that in both of these the reality and integrity of the creature is established, not displaced.[744]

Tanner goes on to argue that theological exposition is affected by the relative priority of divine sovereignty vs. the integrity of the created order; as we have sought to show throughout this thesis, however, these two should not be pitted against one another because it is precisely when we understand the radical nature of God's sovereignty as creator and governor that we have greatest confidence in the integrity of the creation. And on the other hand, as Tanner notes, an emphasis on divine sovereignty becomes problematic – issuing in "moral laxity" and "[h]ostility and ingratitude" – only when "claims that we are nothing without God [are] taken to imply that we are nothing even *with* God; one must infer from talk about God's unconditioned agency that God cannot grant the creature its own powers."[745] In Tanner's view, the way to avoid theological deformity is to identify when an overemphasis is resting on divine sovereignty or creaturely freedom (what she refers to as the "negative" and "positive" aspects of the rules she lays out for proper discourse about creation and creaturely efficacy), and simply push back in the opposite direction. "To block the danger of improper inferences from discourse according to the positive side of our rules the theologian presumably should stress discourse according to the negative side of the rules."[746] But as we have seen, theologians who have done this have not been able to maintain a balanced treatment of the relationship between God and creation (possibly because in Tanner's formulation, the negative aspects of the

[744] Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 113.
[745] Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 114-115.
[746] Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 153.

rules must still respect the positive, and vice versa: emphasis may be placed on divine sovereignty, but not if this emphasis is taken to justify making the creature out to be nothing), with the reformed tendency typically being to evacuate the creature of its created integrity and causal power.[747] Pelagianism can no more be overcome by hyper-Calvinism than Nestorianism can be overcome by Eutychianism, because both share the erroneous metaphysical assumption that divine and creaturely action are in competition with one another.[748] This is a central reason that I have argued here that a reformed doctrine of justification is best worked out, and will avoid common pitfalls, on the foundation of the robust doctrine of creation that we find in Thomas, which does not treat divine sovereignty and creaturely integrity as poles which must be kept in tension, but understand the freedom of the creature as subsisting precisely in the sovereign exercise of God's loving act of creation.

I have argued here that metaphysics matters to theology, and that it is essential that the metaphysics of creation be grounded on a robust doctrine of God and simultaneously be the ground for theological reasoning about providence and justification. But to repeat a point that we made in the introduction, this does not mean that better metaphysics ensures better theology. The perfection of

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[747] Our chief examples were Luther, Edwards, and Barth, with Calvin providing an example of a reformer who worked the doctrine of creation more robustly into his soteriology. Tanner herself, however, notes the "curious… lack of success shown by theologies that do use discourse associated with the negative side of the rules in an attempt to block a perceived danger. … Eventually,… Protestant culture and theology are marked by unabashed Pelagianism of one sort or other: God tends to aid or respond to human actions that proceed independently of God's creative will for them." Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 154.

[748] Cf. Aaron Riches, *Ecce Homo: On the Divine Unity of Christ* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2016), 57-63. As Tanner writes, "The theologian cannot combat Pelagianism by a stress on God's sovereignty because he or she is not making that sovereignty radical enough: God exercises power in the manner of a finite agent who must meet the prima facie constraints on its own operation posed by other beings." Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 160.

theology depends on the overcoming not only of bad philosophy but of evil – of sin, rebellion against the Creator, of vices ranging from *acedia* to *curiositas*.[749] These are overcome not by intelligence operating alone, but by faith seeking understanding. But faith, Paul tells us, comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. The part that philosophical theology has to play must be to articulate more clearly that word, so that the metaphysics of creation may be not only more coherent, but very good, and that creation may be apprehended not merely as a controlling framework, but as a gift, pointing beyond itself to the giver of every good gift.

> Consideration of Christian teaching about creation requires ascetical as well as intellectual virtues. Most of all, it obliges those who consider it to recover the posture of creatures, the dependence and gratitude of derivation and the repudiation of self-subsistence. This is acutely hard for the children of Adam, for we contend against our creaturely nature and calling, from stupidity or pride or fear that unless we snatch at our being and make ourselves authors of its perpetuation and dignity, it will slip away from us. And so we propose to ourselves, sometimes a little guiltily, sometimes with frank confidence, that we constitute a given reality around which all else is arranged. Even God may be so placed, as God 'for us,' a protagonist whose identity not wholly unlike our own, is bound to us, and whose presence confirm the limitless importance of the human drama. All this must be set aside as the mortification and renewal of our spiritual, intellectual and moral nature proceeds. As it is left behind, we may begin to understand how it is that God is indeed for us. Only because the God who is for us is in himself God, entire without us, is his being for us more than a projection of our corrupt longing for a satisfying counterpart. The burden of the Christian doctrines of the Trinity, creation and incarnation is that, because God is from and in himself, he is God for us in ways we can scarcely imagine.[750]

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[749] John Webster, "Curiosity," in *The Domain of the Word* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012), 193-202.
[750] John Webster, "*Non Ex Aequo*: God's Relation to Creatures," in *God Without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology, Vol. 1* (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 126.

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