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Neither Libertarian nor Compatibilist

A Response to Paul Helm

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Abstract

The present essay addresses Paul Helm's most recent attempt to assimilate the thought of such Reformed scholastics as Francis Turretin to the 'compatibilism' of Jonathan Edwards. Helm has misunderstood a series of important scholastic distinctions concerning the relationship of intellect and will in the older faculty psychology, and the relationship of foundational or, as I identified it, 'root' indifference in the will to its multiple potencies. He has, accordingly, failed to register how Reformed orthodox understandings of free choice outlined in recent scholarship affirm both a simultaneity or synchronicity of potencies or capacities of the will and a diachronicity of actual effects and events. The Reformed orthodox writers certainly thought that human freedom was not incompatible with the divine determination of all things—their resolution of the issue does not, however, coincide with modern compatibilism.

Keywords

compatibilism – contingency – freedom – will – free choice – synchronic – Helm – potency – simultaneity – Turretin – Reformed orthodoxy – libertarianism

Traditional Reformed thought on the relationship between the divine will and human freedom has often been identified as a form of determinism that disallows human freedom, reduces human beings to mere automatons, and fails to account for human responsibility. Early modern Reformed thinkers, during both the Reformation of the early sixteenth century and the era of post-Reformation orthodoxy, vigorously opposed what they took to be an accusation of Stoic fatalism and insisted that they could, in fact, account for human freedom and responsibility while at the same time arguing a divine willing of all

things. The debate continues into the twenty-first century, with ‘libertarian’ or ‘Arminian’ writers excoriating ‘Calvinists’ for their determinism and Calvinists responding, one might say almost paradoxically, by confessing a form of determinism, namely ‘compatibilism,’ while at the same time insisting on a form of human freedom. Recent scholarship has added a significantly different dimension to the debate by looking more deeply into the complex distinctions made by early modern Reformed scholastics and arguing that a case can be made that this scholastic theology, in common with several lines of argument inherited from the medievals, found an alternative way of framing the issues of divine and human willing that is quite distinct from the modern patterns of argument. This alternative way of framing the issue of necessity, contingency, and freedom both affirms the divine willing of all things over against libertarianism and argues the case for alternativity in human willing over against the compatibilist reduction of freedom to a view of the will as uncoerced but determined to one and only one effect. This new line of scholarship has been disputed at length by Paul Helm, beginning with his rebuttals of the use of the theory of synchronic contingency to explicate early Reformed thought on freedom and contingency.¹

In his most recent article,² Helm has continued his series of essays countering the arguments put forth in the ground-breaking volume *Reformed Thought on Freedom*³ and in a significant number of other essays,⁴ and has specifically

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- 1 E.g., Paul Helm, “Synchronic Contingency in Reformed Scholasticism: A Note of Caution,” *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 57, no. 3 (2003): 207–222; in response to Antonie Vos, “Scholasticism and Reformation,” in Willem J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker, ed., *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 99–119. The response by Andreas J. Beck and Antonie Vos, “Conceptual Patterns Related to Reformed Scholasticism,” *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 57, no. 3 (2003): 223–233, was countered by Paul Helm, “Synchronic Contingency Again,” *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 57, no. 3 (2003): 234–238. Note also Paul Helm, “‘Structural Indifference’ and Compatibilism in Reformed Orthodoxy,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 5 (2011): 184–205; “Necessity, Contingency and the Freedom of God,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 8, no. 3 (2014), 243–262; “Jonathan Edwards and the Parting of the Ways?,” *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 4, no. 1 (2014), 42–60.; “Francis Turretin and Jonathan Edwards on Compatibilism,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 12 (2018): 335–355; and “Francis Turretin and Jonathan Edwards on Contingency and Necessity,” in Jon Balsarak and Richard Snoddy, eds., *Learning from the Past: Essays on Reception, Catholicity and Dialogue in Honour of Anthony N.S. Lane* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 163–178.
 - 2 Helm, “Francis Turretin and Jonathan Edwards on Compatibilism,” 335–355.
 - 3 Willem J. van Asselt, J. Martin Bac, and Roelf T. te Velde, trans., ed., and commentary, *Reformed Thought on Freedom: The Concept of Free Choice in the History of Early-Modern Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010).
 - 4 E.g., Antonie Vos, “Scotus on Freedom and the Foundation of Ethics: An Utrecht Contribution,” *Vivarium* 38, no. 2 (2000), 195–196; Andreas J. Beck, “Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676):

contested the arguments in my *Divine Will and Human Choice* that early modern Reformed orthodoxy did not advocate a form of determinism and, quite specifically, that the Reformed approaches to human free will or free choice (*liberum arbitrium*) do not coincide either with modern compatibilism or modern libertarianism.⁵ The argument originally presented in *Reformed Thought on Freedom* indicated that

the distinction between absolute necessity (*simpliciter: necessitas consequentis*) and relative necessity (*secundum quid: necessitas consequentiae*) enabled the Reformed scholastics to point out how necessity and contingency/freedom are in certain respects compatible instead of squarely contradictory.

Instead, the Remonstrants simplified the issue by their rejection of the distinction. If necessity and contingency are absolutely opposite, you are forced to be either a libertarian or a determinist. The Remonstrants were content to uphold human freedom and were convinced of Reformed determinism. Yet the Reformed rejected both options as a far too simplistic scheme.⁶

In rejecting both a determinist or compatibilist and a libertarian reading of Reformed orthodox thought, the authors of *Reformed Thought on Freedom* and I have consistently indicated that the early modern Reformed understood divine determination to be compatible with human freedom and, accordingly, stand in a long line of thinkers reaching back to Augustine.⁷

Basic Features of His Doctrine of God,” in *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 205–226; Philip J. Fisk, “Divine Knowledge at Harvard and Yale: From William Ames to Jonathan Edwards,” *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 4, no. 2 (2014): 151–178; Fisk, *Jonathan Edwards’s Turn from the Classic-Reformed Tradition of Freedom of the Will* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016); Hyun-Kwan Kim, “Francis Turretin on Human Free Choice: Walking the Fine Line Between Synchronic Contingency and Compatibilistic Determinism,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 79 (2017): 25–44; and Hyun-Kwan Kim, “The Doctrine of Free Choice,” in Mark Jones and Michael A.G. Haykin, eds., *A New Divinity: Transatlantic Reformed Evangelical Debates During the Long Eighteenth Century* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018), 89–108.

5 Richard A. Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice: Freedom, Contingency, and Necessity in Early Modern Reformed Thought* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017); Muller, “Jonathan Edwards and the Absence of Free Choice: A Parting of Ways in the Reformed Tradition,” *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 1, no. 1 (2011): 3–22. Note also on Turretin’s doctrine, Carl F. Gobelman, “To Be Free, or Not to Be Free?: An Analysis and Assessment of Francis Turretin’s Doctrine of Free Will,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 22 (2011): 129–144.

6 Van Asselt et al., *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, 38.

7 Cf. Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice*, 103–105.

The issue, then, is not about an assumption of compatibility between divine willing and human freedom in Reformed orthodox thought: Helm, the authors of *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, and I stand in agreement on that. There is, in other words, a formal, albeit superficial, resemblance between modern compatibilism and the older Christian tradition, including the views of the Reformers and the Reformed orthodox. But, as the above quotation from *Reformed Thought on Freedom* makes clear, there is also a major difference. This difference appears when a particular theory concerning that compatibility, namely modern compatibilism, is set in contrast to the nuanced distinctions of the older Reformed orthodoxy.

Helm continues to assimilate the early modern Reformed teaching to modern compatibilism and, in his most recent essay, claims that my interpretation assumes “indeterminate freedom of the will” or “indeterminate freedom” and is, accordingly, “false.”⁸ In what follows, I dispute that claim and examine Helm’s objections both to my argumentation and to the approach to synchronic contingency or simultaneous potency in Reformed orthodoxy as pursued both by me and by the authors of *Reformed Thought on Freedom*. After a short prologue, the main body of my response divides into two parts, the first dealing with Helm’s misconstrual of arguments in my *Divine Will and Human Choice* and in *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, the second with several of the early modern texts in dispute. I leave aside the issue of the interpretation of Jonathan Edwards’s deterministic approach to free will, as settled in an earlier essay.⁹

1 The Problem of Modern “isms”

One of the somewhat discomfiting effects of the examination of historical documents on the part of modern theologians and philosophers, particularly when those documents are pre-Kantian and from the other side of Lessing’s ugly

8 Helm, “Francis Turretin and Jonathan Edwards on Compatibilism,” 335.

9 Richard A. Muller, “Jonathan Edwards and Francis Turretin on Necessity, Contingency, and Freedom of Will: In Response to Paul Helm,” *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 4, no. 3 (2014): 266–285; note the similar conclusions, to which Helm has not yet responded, in Kim, “Doctrine of Free Choice,” 104–106; and Fisk, *Jonathan Edwards’ Turn*, 320–324, 333–341, 415–416, 419, etc. Fisk has, moreover, quite conclusively documented the philosophical shift at Harvard that underlies Jonathan Edwards’s failure to grasp the implications of the older Reformed approach to contingency and freedom: see Fisk, *Jonathan Edwards’ Turn*, 212–229, in particular 215–216, 219–220, where Fisk documents Harvard Professor Charles Morton’s view of “moments of nature” or “instants of reason” in a temporal as distinct from a purely logical sense.

ditch, is the element of cognitive dissonance that arises from encounter with ancient, medieval, or early modern terminology. A fairly typical reaction on the part of theologians and philosophers has been quietly to bypass the dissonance and assimilate the terminology to modern theories and linguistic conventions. A good example of this kind of reaction and its problematic result is the modern infliction of a standard of ‘Christocentrism’ on early modern materials.¹⁰ A similar problem arises when the modern terminology and conceptual structures of ‘compatibilism’ and ‘libertarianism’ are used in the interpretation of patristic, medieval, and early modern sources.

The problematic application of this terminology has been noted by various scholars. At the outset of her study of *Anselm on Freedom*, Katherin Rogers indicated that she was about to employ “anachronistic” terminology, notably ‘determinism,’ ‘compatibilism,’ and ‘libertarianism,’ and noted that the terms “are assigned a variety of meanings and definitions in the contemporary literature.”¹¹ Rogers’s subsequent parsing of the terminology offers a careful and highly instructive series of differing ways of defining libertarian and compatibilist views leading toward her own application of the terms in the cases of Augustine and Anselm.¹²

Alfred Freddoso expresses similar reservations in his treatment of Molina, noting first that “in modern terms [Molina] is an unremitting libertarian,” but adding that “we must not conclude ... that the dispute between Molinists and Bañezians ... is a precise analog of the contemporary dispute between libertarians and compatibilists,” given that both Molinists and Bañezians both insist that a free action “is not necessitated by causes operative at times before it takes place,” namely, causes that belong to “the causal history of the world.”¹³ Moreover, as Freddoso points out, in the Bañezian formulation, because “God stands *wholly outside* the order of created causes,” “God can *causally predetermine* that a good effect should be brought about *freely* by secondary causes.”¹⁴ Given Bañez’s understanding of freedom, his view does not cohere with modern compatibilism. On the other hand, in “the Molinist scheme good contingent effects are *predetermined* in that by His middle knowledge God plans for them in detail

10 See Richard A. Muller, “A Note on ‘Christocentrism’ and the Imprudent Use of Such Terminology,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 68 (2006): 253–260.

11 Katherin Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 2.

12 Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom*, 4–8.

13 Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge: Part IV of the Concordia*, trans. with intro. and notes by Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 24, 26, 42; hereinafter cited as Freddoso, “Introduction.”

14 Freddoso, “Introduction,” 42; Freddoso’s italics.

and knows that they will ensue given the total causal contribution He has willed to make to the created world,"¹⁵ a conclusion that, arguably, would not sit easily with modern libertarians.

More recently, Brian Shanley has argued that once a libertarian reading of Aquinas thought has been ruled out on the ground that Aquinas assumes that all creaturely operations, including all acts of the human will, are moved by God as first cause, this conclusion does not render Aquinas a compatibilist "by default," inasmuch as in the Thomist view, "God creates us and sustains us in freedom" and that, according to Aquinas, freedom is "not determined by any temporally antecedent causal chain."¹⁶

Given that Aquinas's and Bañez's accounts of contingency and freedom have parallels in early modern Reformed writings and that Molina's account supplied the engine for Arminius's approach, it should come as no surprise that neither the Reformed nor Arminius's view (as distinct from later Remonstrant argumentation) is easily accommodated to modern compatibilist and libertarian formulations. The problem, then, is not over the compatibility, understood by the Reformed, of divine will with human freedom; the problem lies with the attempt to press modern "-isms" into the recalcitrant historical materials. As the title of Shanley's essay indicates, there is a view of "created freedom" that is "beyond libertarianism and compatibilism."

2 Clarification of Arguments

Much of the debate between Helm and the new scholarship on Reformed thought on divine will and human freedom arises because of two major differences between the older scholastic patterns of thought and argument and modern theological and philosophical assumptions. The first of these differences has already been noted in Freddoso's and Shanley's comments on the two levels of causality—the eternal, divine primary causality and the temporal, creaturely secondary causality. In the older scholastic view, both divine and human willing are necessary to the accomplishment of any human act, neither by itself is sufficient to explain the act, and both operate freely according to their respective natures. Indeed, human freedom depends for its very existence

15 Freddoso, "Introduction," 43.

16 Brian J. Shanley, "Beyond Libertarianism and Compatibilism: Thomas Aquinas on Created Freedom," in Richard Velkley, ed., *Freedom and the Human Person* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 70–89, here 72, 87, 89.

on the freedom of the divine will. Loss of this understanding of concurrent primary and secondary causality leads to an utterly temporalized approach to cause and effect that merges divine and human causality into one closed system. The second of these differences lies in the scholastic distinctions used to explain the operation and interrelation of these two levels of causality—distinctions that once belonged to the common vocabulary of theologians and philosophers but that ceased to be used as the alternative understandings and terminology of modern rationalism (whether Cartesian, Spinozistic, or Lockian) took hold in the eighteenth century and as theology and philosophy passed out of Latin into the vernacular. Loss of the Christian Aristotelian understandings of causality, faculty psychology, necessity and contingency, and the related vocabulary led to the misunderstanding and disuse of the scholastic resolutions of divine will and human freedom.

Helm's argument embodies a series of misconceptions concerning both the early modern Reformed understanding of freedom and my approach to the theory identified as 'synchronic contingency' and argued in *Reformed Thought on Freedom*. These misconceptions arise largely out of a failure to grasp the basic distinctions used by scholastics to argue the case for contingency and freedom. In the first place, Helm improperly describes synchronic contingency as "the idea that the will is such that the *requisites for action A* to be performed being present, an agent *has the power to choose* either not-A or B at that very moment, hence 'synchronic,'" and then comments that one of the strengths of my work is my rejection of "this novel supposition."¹⁷ Better to identify synchronic contingency as "the idea that the operation of intellect and will is such that the *requisites for choice* being present, an agent *simultaneously (or synchronically) has the potencies to choose A; to refuse it, choosing not-A; or to choose B*, hence 'synchronic.'" Once the concept is better defined, it becomes considerably more understandable, considerably less novel, and, clearly, not rejected by me. My own criticism, moreover, does not concern the concept as much as the terminology used to characterize it and the historical background to its reception in the early modern era: the term 'synchronic contingency' may be novel, but the concept it references is not. My preference is to hold, as much as possible, to the language used by the Reformed orthodoxy, namely 'simultaneity of potency,' as a more precise way of referencing the concept.¹⁸

Helm is therefore quite correct in adding that I "find a place for synchronicity" in my "advocacy of the [Reformed orthodox] commitment to multiple

17 Helm, "Francis Turretin and Jonathan Edwards on Compatibilism," 338, my italics.

18 Cf. Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice*, 313–324.

potencies” and in my disagreement with his claim that the Reformed orthodox are “resolutely diachronic,” which is to say, to the exclusion of any synchronicity.¹⁹ The place for synchronicity or simultaneity of potencies is precisely in the assumption of the older faculty psychology held by the Reformed, that the will simultaneously (or synchronously) has multiple capabilities or potencies—while the place for diachronicity is in the assumption also held by the Reformed, as a simple matter of logic, that a person cannot do A and not-A at the same time, but both before and after doing A can choose to do not-A. That person, moreover, can choose either A or not-A because he has potency or capacity for either and can be identified as free because the resident potency to choose not-A does not evaporate when a person chooses A: it just cannot be actualized in the same moment.

On the same issue, Helm is also quite mistaken when he alleges that “Muller says that there are ‘still multiple potencies’ *in sensu composito* in the will,” when the passage that he cited from me only a few pages before has a significantly different nuance: “there are still multiple potencies in the will and *in sensu diviso* (but not *in sensu composito*) the will, having willed A retains in the same moment, a non-actualizable potency to not-A.”²⁰ Helm misconstrues my statement and appears to confuse potency or capacity with actuality and operation. The distinction *in sensu diviso/in sensu composito* is taken over by the Reformed orthodox from their medieval predecessors as a syntactical device in analyzing propositions. As such it relates specifically to potencies as identified in modal propositions. Accordingly, the divided and composite senses are not different states or conditions of something, they are logical representations referencing the same state or condition in different ways. In the discussion of human willing, the divided sense references potencies or capacities, the composite sense references the operation and actuality. Thus, with reference to potencies or capacities, the Reformed orthodox assume, in the divided sense, that there are multiple capacities that always belong to the will and that remain resident when one of them has been actualized. In the composite sense, namely, with reference to operation and actuality, the exercise of one capacity rules out the simultaneous exercise of a contrary or contradictory capacity, but not the existence of that capacity.

Helm’s statement in the same paragraph that “for Muller, in the interval [between a completed action and the next choice of the intellect] the will has

19 Helm, “Francis Turretin and Jonathan Edwards on Compatibilism,” 339.

20 Helm, “Francis Turretin and Jonathan Edwards on Compatibilism,” 351, with the mistake repeated on 355; cf. Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice*, 251, 292, 294, 299, *et passim*; with *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, 193–194.

to remain in a state sufficient to preserve contingency in the agent and to negate compatibilism"²¹ also rather misses the point: the early modern Reformed assume that a finite agent is by nature contingent and that its choices are contingent. In scholastic terminology, these contingencies are necessities of the consequence or necessities of the present, namely, that something must be what it is when it is, even though it could be otherwise. In the case of acts of will, the reason that the act could be otherwise is simply that the free will—according to the Reformed orthodox—has the capability to have done and to do the contrary. Helm's statement also has the distinctly odd implication that "between a completed action and the next choice of the intellect" the state of the will does not preserve contingency, yielding a will that was contingent prior to the choice, is no longer contingent after the choice, and then becomes rather magically contingent again in order to make a subsequent choice, after which it will no longer be contingent, and so forth. Or perhaps he is simply denying the contingency of willing.

Helm is also quite incorrect to interpret my argument as indicating contingency in the world order "considered from the human level, but no contingency when viewed from the viewpoint of the all-encompassing divine decree."²² Helm's mistake here rests on a confusion of necessity with an absence of contingency. In early modern Reformed thought, there are different kinds of necessity: absolute necessity does rule out contingency, but hypothetical necessity, necessity of the consequence, the necessity of the present, necessity of certainty, and necessity of infallibility do not rule out contingency. As indicated in numerous places in my argument, the Reformed orthodox affirmed contingency at both levels of causality, primary and secondary.²³ There are contingencies by divine decree, God being free to will otherwise and being able by his premotion to act in and with secondary causes to bring about contingent effects. These effects, albeit contingent, are nonetheless characterized by a necessity of infallibility on God's part that corresponds with the necessity of the consequence at the human level: as willed freely in both the primary and the secondary causality they are contingent, as existent they are necessary

21 Helm, "Francis Turretin and Jonathan Edwards on Compatibilism," 355.

22 Helm, "Francis Turretin and Jonathan Edwards on Compatibilism," 337.

23 See Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice*, 129, 131, 137, 194–196, 201–203, 212–214, 270–271, *et passim*; and Muller, "Jonathan Edwards and Francis Turretin," 275. Also see Richard A. Muller, "Absolute and Relative; Unconditioned with Conditions; Necessary, Free, and Contingent: Reviewing the Reformed Scholastic Understanding of God," in R. Scott Clark and Joel E. Kim, eds., *Always Reforming: Essays in Honor of W. Robert Godfrey's 65th Birthday* (Escondido: Westminster Theological Seminary, 2010), 56–73, here 61, 64–66.

inasmuch as they must be what they are, and as known by God they are known necessarily as contingencies. In other words, the Reformed hold that contingent things necessarily eventuate contingently by reason of the divine decree.

There is an absolute necessity that the entire world order be grounded in the divine will or decree, given that from the Aristotelian perspective of the early modern Reformed, there can be no motion or action on the part of finite creatures that is not grounded in the willing of God as first mover or first cause. This necessity of a prior, eternal divine willing provides the foundation not only for necessary events in the world order but also for contingent and free events and acts. The contingency and freedom of events and acts in the world order arises both from the first cause and from the second causes. When God wills the motions and acts of all things, he wills that they act according to their natures—and the free agents act freely, having full exercise of their liberties of contradiction and contrariety in the same moment that their acts or motions are willed by God. God always wills freely, and the existence of the entire world order is contingent upon the divine will. The foundation of contingent and free acts in the order of second causality is the freedom of God in the primary order of causality. Indeed, the point is, as the Westminster Confession states, that God's decree establishes the contingencies in the world order as contingent, the free acts as free, and the necessary events as necessary.²⁴ This, in my reading, does not correspond either with modern libertarian or modern compatibilist theories.

3 Examining Some Early Modern Texts

An underlying difference between Helm's reading of the early modern sources and my interpretation has to do with the way in which distinctions between primary and secondary actuality (*actus primus* and *actus secundus*) and between the simultaneity of potency (*simultas potentiae*) and the potency of simultaneity (*potentia simultatis*) are understood. Helm cites Samuel Willard's summary of the issue:

How far there is an *Indifference* to be acknowledged in the Will, respecting *Voluntary* actions, needs not be curiously discussed; only we may observe, that though there may such a thing be allowed to the Will, *in actu primo*,

24 Westminster Confession of Faith, iii.1; v.2, in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes*, 3 vols., 6th ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 3:608, 612.

which the Schools call *Simultas potentiae*, by virtue whereof the Will, according to its own nature, is capable of acting or not acting, or acting thus or contrarily; and is capable of acting thus now, and is afterwards capable of revoking that act; nay indeed, this is the root of the liberty of the Will. Nevertheless, *in actu secundo*, which the Schools call *Potentia Simultatis*, which is in the Wills applying it self to its act, it doth not then act *Indifferently*, but upon choice, by which it is Determined.²⁵

Helm concludes that in the “last sentence” of the quotation, where Willard indicates the absence of a potency of simultaneity in the will’s operation or second actuality (*in actu secundo*), “there is no suggestion ... of resident potencies.”²⁶ Quite true. But in the preceding sentence, multiple potencies are not merely suggested, they are precisely referenced, namely, *simultas potentiae* as defined by Willard as the simultaneous presence of capabilities of acting or not acting in the will’s primary actuality (*in actu primo*).

The presence of resident potencies is also quite apparent in Turretin’s distinction between a simultaneity of potencies in the divided sense with no potency for simultaneity in the composite sense.²⁷ Willard’s and Turretin’s point is not that there is a temporal sequence from the divided to the composite sense but that in any given moment, there is in the divided sense a simultaneity of potencies to multiple effects while there is also, and necessarily so, no potency for simultaneity in the composite sense. Willard also identifies indifference *in actu primo* as the “root of the liberty of the Will.” In other words, potencies to do otherwise are resident, but incapable of actualization at the same time as their contraries and contradictories. The distinction is relevant to the issue of free choice inasmuch as the presence of the potency or capacity to do otherwise is evidence that the choice or act of election is genuinely free.

25 Samuel Willard, *A Brief Reply to Mr George Kieth, in Answer to a Script of His, Entitled, A Refutation of a Dangerous and Hurtfull Opinion, Maintained by Mr. Samuel Willard, &c.* (Boston: Samuel Phillips, 1703), 15; cf. the quotation and analysis of the passage in Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice*, 290–291. Willard is responding to George Keith, *Refutation of a Dangerous & Hurtful Opinion Maintained by Mr. Samuel Willard ... Viz, That the Fall of Adam, and All the Sins of Men, Necessarily Come to Passe by Virtue of Gods Decree* (New York: s.n., 1702).

26 Helm, “Francis Turretin and Jonathan Edwards on Compatibilism,” 353.

27 Francis Turretin, *Institutio theologiae elencticae, in qua status controversiae perspicue exponitur, praecipua orthodoxorum argumenta proponuntur, & vindicantur, & fontes solutionum aperiuntur*, 3 vols. (Geneva: Samuel de Tournes, 1679–1685), VIII.i.8; X.iii.4.

Here Helm seems to read the distinction between *actus primus* and *actus secundus* as a temporal or diachronic sequence, as if the *actus primus* is succeeded and replaced by the *actus secundus*,²⁸ perhaps because he understands *actus* as “action” rather than as “actuality.” But the primary actuality of the faculties, intellect and will, is simply what they are and must be, including all of their potencies or capacities, prior and foundational to any operation of thinking or willing: what is diachronic is the movement to operation and the ongoing operation that is the secondary actuality. What is synchronic or simultaneous is the presence of potencies that identify contradictories and contraries of which the will is capable. In other words, the primary actuality of a faculty is not removed in act or operation of the will. The exercise or actualization of a potency removes neither the potency itself nor the other resident, nonactualized potencies of the faculty. Willard also adds that this freedom of will or choice is such that “not the understanding, nor the will in the man, but the whole man is a free cause.”²⁹ A free cause, by definition, is a cause that is not determined to one effect, a point that Helm does not take duly into consideration. His “resolutely diachronic” reading of freedom leaves the will, to borrow Shanley’s phrase, “determined by [a] temporally antecedent causal chain.”

Helm is quite opposed to my argument that “follow” does not indicate a causal necessity or command in the Reformed writers’ statement that the will must follow the last judgment of the practical intellect. He comments, “Muller suggests that the ‘must follow’ is a matter of order, not of command or compulsion” and concludes that, according to my interpretation, “The act of will, in other words, does not follow the judgment of the intellect.” As if ‘follow’ can only mean to have been caused by an antecedent. Quite to the contrary, Turretin’s use of the Latin *sequor* allows for a range of meaning, as also does the English ‘follow’: follow, come after, attend, succeed to, ensue, accede to, or come next in order. Helm’s conclusion is therefore a bit of a non sequitur.

Turretin and others of the Reformed distinguish the faculties of intellect and will without separating them into two things or realities. Intellect and will are conjoined. Their distinction is extrinsic and made with reference to the object as judged and chosen.³⁰ Rational necessity is not causal necessity: the ‘rational

28 Note that this mistake parallels the arguments that Jonathan Edwards would have encountered at Harvard: see Fisk, *Jonathan Edwards’ Turn*, 215–216, 219–220.

29 Willard, *Brief Reply to Mr George Kieth*, 15.

30 Turretin, *Institutio*, x.i.5; cf. Muller *Divine Will and Human Choice*, 252; and note also 247 on Voetius.

necessity' of the intellect determining an object does not impede freedom of will. Rather, it serves to define how the will that "cannot not follow [*non possit non sequi*]" such a determination can still remain free: the will is a rational faculty that cannot proceed without knowing an object.³¹ It belongs to the nature of the two faculties that the intellect produces rational judgments and the elective act of will, as rational, follows upon rational judgments. Not only is it the case that *sequor* does not necessarily indicate a causal sequence, but Turretin also does not exactly say "*must follow*" (Helm's italics, implying a causal necessity)³²—Turretin, literally rendered, says "cannot not follow" or "not able not to follow," which simply from a grammatical point of view lacks the causal implication of "must follow."

Turretin, unfortunately, does not offer a definition of "follow" or offer a full explanation of the interrelationship of the faculties. He does, however, provide enough detail in his discussion of necessities to rule out Helm's position. After describing which kinds of necessity remove freedom and which kinds do not, Turretin also identifies the kinds of freedom that belong to the will, namely, liberty of contrariety and liberty of contradiction. He places these liberties in the will, not in the intellect. Helm's reading of Turretin's "cannot not follow" as a causal "*must follow*" rather than as the establishment of an order in the act of choosing removes the will's liberties of contradiction and contrariety and reduces it to a necessary cause, determined to one effect. Neither can Helm's argument reconcile the terms found in Willard's account: the will must follow the practical intellect but the will also "is capable of acting or not acting, or acting thus or contrarily." If "follow" is causal in Helm's sense, how can the will either refuse to act or act contrarily?

Turretin has previously ruled out compulsion as interfering with freedom: why would he merely rule out an external compulsion and allow for an inward compulsion of the will by the intellect? The will does not, of course, elect an object in utter isolation: Turretin argues both an 'extrinsic' determination by divine providence and an 'intrinsic' or inward determination by the intellect, neither of which, however, removes "the nature of free will to determine itself."³³ We remind ourselves that a determination is a diacritical act:

31 Turretin, *Institutio.*, x.ii.7: "quoad necessitatem rationalem determinationis ad unum ab intellectu pratico. Cum enim voluntas sit appetitus rationalis, ea est ejus natura, ut non possit non sequi ultimum intellectus practici judicium; alias posset appetere malum sub ratione mali, & adversari bonum sub ratione boni, quod est *asytaton*."

32 Helm, "Turretin and Edwards on Compatibilism," 35.

33 Turretin, *Institutio.*, x.iii.7: "voluntas nunquam potest esse sine determinatione tam extrinseca a Dei providentia, quam intrinseca ab intellectus judicio, ut antea probatum fuit ...

when the intellect makes a determination, it identifies an object for the will as distinct from other objects; when the will determines itself it makes distinctions with regard to the object. As Franciscus Gomarus commented, the act of will is free from necessity because “by itself [the will] is indeterminate” but it “determines itself by an intrinsic potency to elicit its own act.”³⁴ Gomarus’s point references “the common Scholastic thesis that every free action involves freedom with respect to elicited mental acts of willing or dissenting” and obliges the standard distinction between commanded acts and elicited acts.³⁵

There are two distinct ways in which early modern Reformed writers resolve the issue of how the will receives the determination of its object by the intellect and still retains its freedom. Neither of them corresponds with Helm’s approach. Both John Weemse and Edward Reynolds assume that the will follows and accepts the judgment of the intellect, but neither regards the priority of the intellectual determination as causal. Both also assume a fundamental volitional exercise in desiring an object, in response to which the intellect provides a judgment.³⁶ According to John Weemse, the intellect is a deliberative, not an appetitive faculty. It provides the condition for the determination of the will but does not cause the free choice: “the *understanding* is not the *cause*”; rather, it provides “the *condition* without which [the will] could not chuse.”³⁷ Edward Reynolds provides a similar perspective. He holds that the operation of the will “presumes” a prior act of the intellect. The act of the understanding has been identified by the “Schoole-men” as “a Mandate or Command;

Nec obstat quod dicitur esse de ratione voluntatis liberae, ut seipsam determinet, quia subordinata non pugnat: De ratione quidem voluntatis est, ut a se determinetur, sed non a se sola; sic determinatio voluntatis, non excludit, sed supponit, determinationem Dei.”

34 Franciscus Gomarus, *Disputatio theologica de libero arbitrio* (Leiden: Joannes Patius, 1603), iv: “liberum a necessitate est illud quod ex seipso est indeterminatum. i. ex intrinseca potentia determinat seipsum ad actum suum elicendum”; and see the discussion of Gomarus by E. Dekker and M.A. Schouten in *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, 127–144; and Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice*, 220–224.

35 Freddoso, “Introduction,” 25; and see Alan Donagan, “Thomas Aquinas on Human Action,” in Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, Jan Pinborg, and Eleonore Stump, eds. *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy: From the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism, 1100–1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 650–651.

36 John Weemse, *The Portraiture of the Image of God in Man: In his three estates, of Creation, Restauration, Glorification*, in *The Workes of Mr. Iohn. Weemse of Lathocker in Scotland*, 4 vols. (London: T. Cotes for Iohn Bellamie, 1637), 1.xvi (98); Edward Reynolds, *A Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of the Soul of Man with the Severall Dignities and Corruptions Thereunto Belonging* (London: F.N. for Robert Bostock and George Badger, 1650), 541–542.

37 Weemse, *Portraiture*, 1.xvi (105).

because it is a *Precept*, to which the Will ought to be obedient.”³⁸ Reynolds’s use of ‘ought’ is crucial. He continues:

it may not hence be concluded that the Understanding hath any Superiority, in regard of Domination over the Will, though it have Priority in regard of Operation. The Power of the Understanding over the Will, is only a Regulating and Directing, it is no constraining or Compulsive Power. For the Will always is *Domina suorum actuus*, the Mistresse of her own Operation.³⁹

The act of willing the object must follow the determination of the understanding—quite so, but the free choice of the will is not caused by the understanding. It is the will that governs, moderates, and rules over all human actions, with the judgment of the understanding providing “some precedent guiding Acts” that are “proportioned to the Rules of right Reason” and identifying some means to an end as more suitable than others.⁴⁰ Arguably Turretin’s view is similar to that of Weemse and Reynolds.

Other Reformed writers formulate the argument in a voluntaristic manner with still more emphasis on the independence of the will, emphasizing its liberties of contradiction and contrariety. Gulielmus Bucanus provides a good example of this pattern of definition in his *Institutiones theologicae*:

in the proper sense, Free Choice does not signify a faculty of doing good or evil, or indeed a liberty of judgement, but rather the faculty of willing or nilling something, or the free pleasure of the will, that follows the deliberation and consultation of the reason or the mind: or a free will, by which the will either wills or does not will, chooses or refuses those things, that are presented as objects by the mind or understanding: and not only of ends but also of means.⁴¹

38 Reynolds, *Treatise of the Passions*, 518.

39 Reynolds, *Treatise of the Passions*, 518.

40 Reynolds, *Treatise of the Passions*, 518, 537.

41 Gulielmus Bucanus, *Institutiones theologicae, seu locorum communium Christianae religionis, ex Dei verbo, et praestantissimorum theologorum orthodoxo consensu expositorum* (Bern: Iohannes & Isaias Le Preux, 1605), xi (109): “Itaque proprie Liberum Arbitrium non significat facultatem vel bonum vel malum agendi, vel etiam iudicii libertatem, sed potius facultatem volendi aut nolendi aliquid: seu liberum voluntatis placitum, quod rationis seu mentis deliberationem sequitur, & consultationem: seu liberam voluntatem, qua quae a mente vel intellectu obiecta sunt, voluntas vult aut non vult, eligit aut respuit: estque non solum finium, sed etiam mediorum.”

Bucanus restated the issue in his definition of *liberum arbitrium* after the fall. He first indicates that it is the power or potency of the intellect to know and discern good and evil—and the power or potency of the will to choose or refuse either, yielding the definition,

with respect to the mind showing the object to be chosen or refused it is called *Arbitrium*. It is *Liberum* with respect to the will which voluntarily and of its own accord follows or refuses the judgement of the intellect.⁴²

Virtually identical definitions are by Zacharias Ursinus and Lucas Trelcatius, Sr. and Jr.⁴³ All of these writers indicate a freedom of the will following the determination of an object by the intellect, understood specifically as a freedom to choose or to reject that object, which is also the view presented more than a century later by Samuel Willard.

Willard specifically identifies this capability of contraries and contradictories, as “indifference” and “the root of the liberty of the Will.” In his preceding paragraph, Willard defined the point by identifying the root of freedom in the *lubentia* or willingness to act, the nature of which, he noted, had been “disputed in the Schools”: some had indicated that the willingness arises from an initial indifference to will or not to will, others had identified the willingness with spontaneity.⁴⁴ Willard’s own preference is to hold “that freedom of will properly consist in a spontaneity,” which he defines further as the “liberty of chusing or refusing.”⁴⁵ Spontaneity, acting of one’s own accord, then, in Willard’s definition is not merely the uncoerced movement of will; it is also defined by alternativity.

Willard continues, however, in the paragraph cited by Helm, by arguing that there is an indifference, defined in scholastic terms as a *simultas potentiae*, in

42 Bucanus, *Institutiones theologicae*, xviii (189).

43 Zacharias Ursinus, *The Summe of Christian Religion, delivered by Zacharias Ursinus in his Lectures upon the Catechism ... Wherein are debated and resolved the questions of whatsoever points of moment which have beene or are controverted in divinity*, trans. Henry Parry (Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1595), 137; Lucas Trelcatius, Sr., *Loci communes s. s. theologiae. Libri duo* (Leiden: Ioannes Orlers & Ioannes Maire, 1614), viii (185); Lucas Trelcatius, Jr., *Scholastica et methodica locorum communium s. theologiae institutio, didactice & elenctice in epitome explicata: in qua, veritas locorum communium, definitionis cuiusque, loci per causas suas analysi asseritur: contraria vero argumenta, imprimis Bellarmini, generalium solutionum appendice refutantur* (London: John Bill, 1604), iii (203).

44 Willard, *A Brief Reply ro Mr George Kieth*, 14.

45 Samuel Willard, *A Compleat Body of Divinity in Two Hundred and Fifty Expository Lectures on the Assembly’s Shorter Catechism* (Boston: B. Green and S. Kneeland, 1727), 185.

the initial state of the will apart from and prior to act or operation, namely, *in actu primo*. The movement of will from its primary, preoperative actuality (*actus primus*) into its operative actuality (*actus secundus*) is marked by the determination and choice or rejection of an object—specifically by a movement from indifference to determination: “in a free agent *Indifferency* may be taken away, but as long as he still acts *Spontaneously*, he acts freely,” the spontaneity being defined by the “liberty of chusing or refusing.” There is no indifference in *actu secundo*, inasmuch as the act has been completed, the object chosen or rejected. Accordingly, there is in the composite sense no *potentia simultatis*, namely no potency of choosing and refusing the same object at the same time and in the same way.

Willard recognizes, however, that the will is not only “capable of acting or not acting, or acting thus or contrarily” but is also “capable of acting thus now, and is afterwards capable of revoking that act.” The will cannot act and revoke the act in the same moment, but having acted, it retains the capability of revoking the act. Helm appears—incorrectly—to identify the terms *in sensu diviso* and *in sensu composito* with a movement from *actus primus* to *actus secundus*, not recognizing that the terms provide a logical distinction regarding the status of human potency or capability in the same moment and, therefore, can both be used to explain the issue of potencies in the will *in actu secundo*.⁴⁶ Even so, Helm does not recognize that the primary actuality of the will does not disappear but remains present as the foundational formal identity of the will as an indifferent reservoir of potencies that are the basis of the will’s liberties of contradiction and contrariety. This presence, simultaneously, of an unactualized (and in the moment unactualizable) potency illustrates what I identified as “root indifference” as Turretin comments, the will “can always be indifferent *in actu primo* and in the divided sense”—indeed, even *in actu secundo*, in the divided sense, “the will when it determines itself, can still be indifferent in itself.”⁴⁷

There is a major difference here: in Helm’s, as in Edwards’s view of human freedom, there is no indeterminacy. The will is causally determined from the outset, whether by the identification of the object or by its own predispositions. In the Reformed orthodox view, the will is indeterminate with regard its particular objects in its primary state or actuality, prior to choice. The entire thrust of the argument is to understand how the will moves from indeterminacy to deter-

46 Helm, “Francis Turretin and Jonathan Edwards on Compatibilism,” 352–353.

47 Turretin, *Institutio*, VI.V.11: “potest tamen semper esse indifferens in actu primo & in sensu diviso,” the reason being that “ipsa voluntas, quando seipsam determinat, potest tamen esse in se indifferens.” Cf. further, Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice*, 287–288.

mination. In other words, in Helm's view of human freedom, as in Edwards's, there is no root or underlying indifference in the will. It is always predisposed to act in a particular way in relation to a particular object and particular circumstances. In the older Reformed view, however, the nature of free choice is such that intellect and will act together to move from indifference to the determination of an object, with liberties of contradiction and contrariety remaining in the will. This does not mean that Reformed thought on freedom allows for no hindrances, inclinations, and dispositions, that can guide, delimit, and to some extent direct human willing, but none of these acts as causes necessitating the will, none compel the will. The will remains free, having an "intrinsic potency to elicit its own act."

Helm's concluding comment that "as a potency into actuality à la Turretin is necessitated by the intellect, so *ipso facto* a potency to the opposite is rendered inoperable" assumes a causal necessity where there is none, misses the meaning of 'potency' as a resident capacity, fails to distinguish between different kinds of necessity, and misunderstands what it means for the will to follow the intellect. The intellect is not an engine that necessitates the actualization of potencies by the will.

Helm's claim that certain of the phrases used in describing the Reformed orthodox position, notably, 'genuine liberty,' 'contingency,' and 'could have done otherwise,' are "by current standards underdescribed" begs the question. The phrase 'could have done otherwise' is not mine, but is a standard rendering of the Latin usage, *potest aliter se habere*, typical of medieval and early modern scholastic discourse. The phrase indicates, quite precisely, a contingency that, given the simultaneously present resident capabilities (potencies) of the will, a person is capable of choosing or refusing an object or of choosing another object, with the will determining its own act. To claim, moreover, that such language has a parallel in an Edwardsian identification of contingency with "the belief in an agent's mind that he could have done otherwise had other reasons to act thusly been uppermost" is hardly credible.⁴⁸ The Reformed orthodox identify an actual, genuine contingency in the real order of things—Helm here identifies a "belief," an imagined or purely epistemic contingency. Such willing may be spontaneous or uncoerced, but in the older Reformed view it is not (genuinely) free.

'Genuine liberty,' 'genuine contingency,' and 'genuine alternativity,' therefore, are also not underdescribed. The problem is not underdescription but a lack of correlation between traditional Reformed argumentation and modern

48 Helm, "Francis Turretin and Jonathan Edwards on Compatibilism," 338.

compatibilism. The terms rather accurately describe the Reformed orthodox assumption that the will itself has the capacity to choose or refuse or to choose something other—quite in contrast to the compatibilist assumption, in this case Edwards’s assumption, that the mind has mistakenly interpreted the spontaneity of the will as a capacity in the moment to do otherwise. In the absence of a capacity to achieve a different effect or result, there is no “genuine” contingency or alternativity.

4 A Concluding Note on Synchronic Contingency and Simultaneity of Potencies

Helm indicates that “one of the great strengths of Muller’s book” is the case that I make against synchronic contingency but also suggests that I haven’t “shucked off synchronicity and simultaneity,”⁴⁹ when in fact I have not made a case against synchronic contingency or expressed any interest in disposing of the issue of simultaneity: my argument, at least as I thought I presented it, was not that concept of ‘synchronic contingency’ or ‘simultaneous contingency,’ was problematic but that the term ‘simultaneity of potency,’ as resident in the historical sources, offered a better way of characterizing the early modern Reformed assumptions concerning human willing and choosing. The reason for my preference, moreover, is not merely that the term ‘synchronic’ or ‘simultaneous contingency’ does not appear in the historical sources, but that the sources themselves were focused not on potentially alternative, simultaneous, or synchronous contingencies, but on actually resident simultaneous potencies in the will.

My preference for *simultas potentiae* over synchronic contingency rests, moreover, on the issue that, in the act of human willing, one potency is actualized, bringing about a contingent effect while the contrary potency remains (in the divided sense) as a potency, incapable of being actualized. In other words, there are multiple potencies existing simultaneously, but there is (and can be) only a single contingency that is actualized. There is a simultaneity or synchronicity of potencies, but no simultaneity or synchronicity of contingencies not, at least, when human freedom is being considered as such.

If, then, simultaneity of potency or potencies is the term properly used to describe the capabilities of a free will in producing a contingent effect, there remains a sense in which synchronic or simultaneous contingency can be used

49 Helm, “Francis Turretin and Jonathan Edwards on Compatibilism,” 338, 355.

to identify the larger framework of divine and human willing in which a concurrent divine motion is required at the primary level of causality in order for any motion, including free acts of the will, to occur at the secondary level. Still, in my view, the preferable terminology is in the documents themselves, where there is reference to *contingentia*, *libertas*, *concursus*, and *praemotio physica*. Once the divine concurrence or premotion is considered together with the human act of willing, there are two contingencies—the divine act of will that could have been otherwise and the human act that also could have been otherwise, together yielding by a necessity of the consequence the one effect that, accordingly, could have been otherwise. The divine willing, as first-order causality, is metaphysically prior to all second-order or finite movements, including human willing. This priority, however, is a priority in nature but not in time: God, as first cause, renders second-order causes and wills capable of causing and willing, even as he renders them capable of being. This understanding of two levels of causality, the higher both rendering the lower or secondary order possible and actively bringing about necessities, contingencies, and free acts that are also brought about by finite agents acting according to their own natures, is a consistent understanding throughout both the late medieval and the early modern eras—and it is neither libertarian nor compatibilist. It is certainly within Helm's prerogative to declare that these views are "false" theologically or philosophically—but the documents belie his claim that such views are nonexistent among the Reformed orthodox.

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