John Calvin's Ideas

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Contents

Shall we say that the philosophers were blind in their fine observation and artful description of nature? Shall we say that those men were devoid of understanding who conceived the art of disputation and taught us to speak reasonably?

Human reason, therefore, neither approaches, nor strives toward, nor even takes a straight aim at, this truth: to understand who the true God is or what sort of God he wishes to be toward us.

John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*

Introduction

John Calvin was a theological genius, but that genius did not express itself in a vacuum. This book does not study Calvin's theology as such, but some of the context in which he worked, and some of the ideas he inherited. It is concerned with Calvin as a receiver, user, and transmitter of theological ideas, and particularly of those theological ideas that have philosophical aspects and histories to them. Calvin was neither a philosopher nor a philosophical theologian but his first-rate intellect had a systematizing bent that is congenial to a philosopher and that was receptive to philosophical ideas. It is interesting and important to see where Calvin used philosophical ideas and arguments, and also to study those places in which he refuses to follow an argument wherever it may lead, and the reasons he has for this.

Calvin is frequently taken to stand apart from the late medieval theological tradition. He is portrayed as a biblicist, a humanist-influenced lawyer by training, who lacked an education in scholastic theology (although not in scholastic philosophy). His theological interest is taken to be practical rather than theoretical. This kept him from speculating about God's character or purposes or from seeing or seeking a three- or fourfold sense in Scripture while leading him to stick to commenting on the grammatical text tersely and sparingly. He invariably writes theology for the Church, writing in the first or second person of the knowledge of God and ourselves and, because he is convinced that Scripture is theologically sufficient for present purposes, he delights in the concrete rather than in the abstract. On this view, if theology is a science, then Calvin is an applied rather than a pure scientist who sees theology's worth more in encouraging appropriate religious responses than in increasing metaphysical comprehension.

In these respects his work is said to stand in sharp relief both to the Catholic medieval tradition, which he is invariably portrayed as condemning for being sophistical and speculative, as well as to the tradition of later Reformed Scholasticism.[1] The latter, legend has it, is an un-Calvinian

[1] For such judgements, see, for example, Brian G. Armstrong, *Calvin and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth Century France* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 31–2. On Reformed Scholasticism and its significance, see for example Richard Muller, 'Calvin and the Calvinists: Assessing Continuities and Discontinuities Between the Reformation and

aberration that followed from the reintroduction of the scholastic method into Reformed churches and that used the doctrine of the double predestination as its methodological axiom. Theodore Beza, appointed as Calvin's deputy sheriff, became the guy in the black Stetson who succeeded in running all the good guys out of town. True Calvinists, so the legend goes, have never forgiven him.

This view of Calvin's relation to his forebears and successors is currently in the process of being severely reshaped, if not totally dismantled, by the influence of four or so separate lines of scholarly inquiry.

The first is research into the medieval tradition, particularly into the world of late medieval Augustinianism, that shows it to be much more multiform than previously thought and to contain strands congenial to the incipient Reform movement, strands that fed directly into the education and experience of Martin Luther and Peter Martyr Vermigli, for example, as well as into Calvin.[2] Important elements of this tradition were in the air that each of them breathed, although it may be that Calvin's more detailed acquaintance with scholastic theology came later in his career; suggestions that he learned theology from John Major seem unfounded.[3] He seems to have picked up scholastic theology on the hoof.

So considerable attention is being paid to Calvin's situation as an heir to the later Middle Ages, an inheritor of a mind-set strongly imbued with scholasticism. Though Calvin repeatedly inveighs against speculation, whether

Orthodoxy, Part I', *Calvin Theological Journal* (1995), Part II, *Calvin Theological Journal* (1996); Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Durham, N C: Labyrinth Press, 1986), and Carl R. Trueman and R. S. Clark (eds.), *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999). A selection of translated texts may be found in *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. and trans. by John W. Beardslee III (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965).

[2] See, for example, Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). H. A. Oberman, *The Dawn of the Reformation: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986); Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (3rd edn., Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2000); David C. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), and *Luther in Context* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1995); Denis R. Janz, *Luther and Late Medieval Thomism: A Study in Theological Anthropology* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1983); *The Peter Martyr Library,* vol. 4: *The Philosophical Works*, trans. Joseph C. McClelland (Kirkville, Mo.: Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies, 1996); Frank James III, *Peter Martyr Vermigli and Predestination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998). On Theodore Beza, see Jeffrey Mallinson, *Faith, Reason, and Revelation in Theodore Beza (1519–1605)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Mallinson draws attention to the strong theological parallels between Calvin and Beza.

[3] For arguments against the claim that Calvin learned scholastic theology from Major, see Alexandre Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin*, trans. David Foxgrover and Wade Provo (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), ch. 16. See also A. N. S. Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1999), and Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, 45–6.

scholastic or not, this should not blind us to his indebtedness to such modes of thought, nor to his own occasional speculative flights, any more than should his own style of doing theology. The judgement that Calvin was virulently anti-scholastic cannot be sustained, not at least from references to the scholastics that one finds in the *Institutes*. For instance, when Calvin dissents from some scholastic he often does so simply over the substance of the view, what that scholastic believed, and not to the scholastic method as such. He appropriates without embarrassment the distinctions of the schools when he judges that it is necessary or useful to do so. In fact, when we separate Calvin's criticism of the scholastics for 'speculation' or 'excessive speculation' from the other things that Calvin has to say about them, we find him making a range of judgements.

Take, for example, part of his discussion of free will in *Institutes* II. 2. Calvin shows that, though Lombard and the scholastics are basically Augustinian in their approach, they make certain distinctions of their own, for example, *arbitrium* referring to reason and *liberum* to the will, and he recognizes that the schools distinguish freedom from necessity as well as from sin and from misery, declaring 'I willingly accept this distinction, except in so far as necessity is falsely confused with compulsion'.[4] By contrast, a few pages later he makes it clear that he believes that the schoolmen pervert the meaning of Romans 7.[5] Elsewhere he makes distinctions between sounder and less sound schoolmen,[6] reserving particular venom for theologians at the Sorbonne, 'mothers of all errors'.[7] The 'Sorbonnists' in question were his contemporaries at the Sorbonne, whom he saw as obstructing reform. It is interesting that Calvin's French versions of the Latin *Institutes* often use 'Sorbonnist' in place of 'scholastic'.[8]

Even to say that Calvin's own theological style was non-scholastic or anti-scholastic needs to be qualified; for while Calvin's *Institutes* is not patterned on the model of, say, Aquinas's *Summae* and no doubt owes a great deal to Renaissance rhetorical style, there are nevertheless many discussions in it that have the pattern of thesis/objections/responses that was characteristic of the schools. Richard Muller observes that the

> pattern of argument in many of the chapters of the *Institutes* . . . reflects a fairly strict observation of the form of scholastic disputation, moving from the initial statement of a point to various objections and replies to objections. . . . It is also clear from Calvin's usage that technical *distinctiones* occupied virtually the same place in his theological method as they did in the development of Lombard's *Sententiae*: the

[4] *Inst.* II. 2. 5. All quotations from the *Institutes* are from *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. F. L. Battles (London: SCM Press, 1961).

[5] *Inst.* II. 2. 27. [6] *Inst.* II. 2. 6. [7] *Inst.* III. 15. 7.

[8] Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, 50–2. See also Oberman, *The Dawn of The Reformation*, 248.

distinctio offered a means of dealing with difficulties and even potential contradictions in the text of Scripture or between a biblical statement and a truth known from some other perspective.[9]

This is equally true of Calvin's polemical works devoted to single issues. He valued the patterns of logic and rhetoric that he had inherited, not only from the Renaissance but also from ancient and medieval worlds: 'Shall we say that the philosophers were blind in their fine observation and artful description of nature? Shall we say that those men were devoid of understanding who conceived the art of disputation and taught us to speak reasonably?'[10]

Occasionally we find Calvin writing in a fairly self-conscious way about the Renaissance and its beneficial effects and of God in his own day having 'revived the human sciences, which are both proper and profitable for the guidance of our lives and which, while being used for our benefit, can also serve his glory'.[11] And occasionally the influence of the new learning is seen in Calvin's willingness to offer purely rational and empirical arguments against some particular view. Thus in the work against astrology just quoted he argues that if the principles of astrology are sound, then it should be the moment of conception that is relevant to a person's fate and not the date of his birth.

The discriminating judgements that Calvin makes of the scholastics—he usually reserves the term 'sophist' for those speculative thinkers whose trains of thought he rejects as a matter of principle—are paralleled in his judgements of 'the philosophers'. For example, he rejects Aristotle's views on immortality[12] and on praise and blame,[13] but commends him for his shrewdness in his account of incontinence.[14] In *Institutes* II. 2. 3 he approves of what Cicero writes about the effect of wicked opinions but several lines later he rejects Cicero's view that it is in our own power whether or not we live virtuously.

Consequently, the days are past when Calvin could be seen as a purely 'biblical' Reformer, a theologian of 'the Word'. As if he wrote his *Institutes* and his voluminous commentaries, preached and carried on controversy, in a way that was uncontaminated either by Renaissance or scholastic influences, and instead delighted in paradox and mystery in a way that made him a forerunner of many a 'dialectical' theologian. If a dialectical theologian is someone who strives to balance one theological element against another, say a high view of created human nature balanced by a radical view of fallen-

[9] Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, 45–6.

[10] *Inst.* II. 2. 15.

[11] *Advertissement contre l'astrologie qu'on appelle iudiciaire, et autre curiositéz qui regnent aujourd'huy au monde* (1549), trans. Mary Potter as *A Warning Against Judiciary Astrology and Other Prevalent Curiosities*, *Calvin Theological Journal* (1983), 163.

[12] *Inst.* I. 5. 5.

[13] *Inst.* II. 5. 2.

[14] *Inst.* II. 2. 23.

ness, then certainly Calvin was a dialectical theologian. But if a dialectical theologian is someone who opposes one theological element to another in order to effect some novel synthesis, then Calvin was not among their number. John Calvin was a Reformer and a reformer is a re-former. He re-formed his Christian inheritance, with its intricate interplay of theological and philosophical themes, along distinctly evangelical lines, but he did not abandon it.

A second line of scholarly inquiry that is reshaping our understanding of Calvin's relation to his forebears and successors is research into the onset and character of Protestant scholasticism. We now can see that Protestant scholasticism was not the exclusive preserve of the so-called High Calvinists but a pervasive phenomenon embracing the style of early Calvinists such as Peter Martyr Vermigli and Hieronymus Zanchi as well as non-Calvinists such as Jacobus Arminius. Thus, sole responsibility for Calvinistic doctrinal development (or, if you prefer, doctrinal deterioration) on faith and assurance, say, or on limited atonement, cannot be laid at the door of scholasticism as such, for scholasticism is merely a method of intellectual inquiry.[15] Establishing links between Calvin's ideas and those of the medieval world makes it more plausible to ascribe doctrinal continuity between Calvin and later Reformed scholasticism, because some of the sources of such scholasticism are to be found in Calvin's own method. But to examine the strands of such continuity largely falls outside the scope of this book.

A third line of inquiry is the attention that is being paid to Calvin's own words, both in his writings and more surprisingly, perhaps, in his sermons. Looking at this material while being alert to the possibility of the influence of earlier theological styles on Calvin, we shall see that Calvin conveys to his readers and hearers an intimate knowledge of scholastic distinctions and their associated doctrines. He had mastered them in the sense that he was prepared to endorse or reject them whenever it suited him to do so. As Aquinas ran with Aristotle when he judged it appropriate but parted company from him when he thought that revealed truth was at stake (on the eternity of matter, say, or the nature of angelic intelligence), so Calvin the preacher, while mostly eschewing a scholastic method of organizing his material, effortlessly appropriated not only their distinctions but a doctrinal outlook similar to that of many scholastics.

All three strands of inquiry into Calvin's ideas and their legacy are found in this book. I do not argue over, propose, or speculate about precisely who were Calvin's mentors, those singular figures through whom the tradition

[15] See Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, ch. 3.

was transmitted to him, and transmuted in the process.[16] How dominant was the dominance of Augustine? How significant, if at all, was the influence of the later medieval philosopher John Major? What was the precise significance of his legal education? In what sense was Calvin's first work, his commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia*, a Renaissance work? In what sense is the *Institutes* itself a Renaissance work? There is scholarly consensus on the answers to at least some of these questions as well as some excellent work on Calvin's overall relation to philosophy, for example, Charles Partee's *Calvin and Classical Philosophy*.[17] No attempt is made to address any of these questions nor to consider the equally interesting but murkier issues about Calvin's temperament and its effect on his theology.

Did Calvin's theology change over the years? Unlike his hero Augustine, Calvin published no retractions. I shall simply assume, unless there is explicit evidence to the contrary (as occasionally there is), that, prompted by controversy and by what he judged to be the needs of the church, Calvin articulated and developed but did not substantially modify his early ideas. I shall endeavour to take what we might call the literary deposit of Calvin's work, particularly in his *Institutes* and his controversial works, and study it as someone might study any philosophical or theological text from 500 years ago—Descartes's *Meditations*, say, or Hobbes's *Leviathan*. This is to study Calvin's writings for the ideas and arguments that they contain. We are interested in the provenance of those concepts and arguments only where that can throw light on his concepts and arguments and thus help us to avoid howlers and promote interpretations that are appropriately nuanced.

A further major contemporary influence on the study of Calvin is the sudden growth in contemporary analytical philosophy of what has come to be called 'Reformed' epistemology. 'Reformed' epistemology criticizes the classical foundationalism of the Enlightenment and defends the reasonableness of religious belief in a way that finds inspiration in Calvin's remarks on the universal *sensus divinitatis* and (more recently) in what Calvin called the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit.[18] Alvin Plantinga, the *fons* if not the *origo* of 'Reformed' epistemology, also makes the bold claim that Calvin, and with him any true Calvinist, has philosophical objections to natural theology.[19] So in this quite unexpected way the ideas of a non-philosopher,

[16] The extent to which it is safe to draw conclusions about the way in which Calvin was directly influenced by the Church Fathers and others, through their writings, has been meticulously researched by A. N. S. Lane. See his *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers*.

[17] (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977).

[18] Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), part III.

[19] Alvin Plantinga, 'The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology', *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, (1980).

John Calvin, have taken on contemporary philosophical significance. We shall look at this appeal to Calvin, and the interpretation of him by the proponents of 'Reformed' epistemology.

I hope that my evaluation of that appeal, together with my broader assessment of Calvin's philosophical inheritance and his use of philosophical materials, will put 'Reformed' epistemology in true perspective. It will be argued that the proponents of 'Reformed' epistemology have misinterpreted Calvin's appeal to the *sensus divinitatis*, and I shall also try to show, particularly by looking at what Calvin has to say about the *sensus divinitatis*, equity, and natural law, as well as in other ways, that Calvin cannot easily be pressed into a communitarian rather than into a natural theological mould.[20] Calvin is, I believe, an evidentialist rather than fideist or a 'Reformed' epistemologist, with real but modest expectations as far as the natural knowledge of God is concerned. On the other hand, I shall argue that 'Reformed' epistemology's appeal to the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit is more faithful to Calvin.

Because this book looks at philosophical issues and theological ideas rather than being a treatise on Calvin's theology, we shall consider topics and themes that sometimes cut across the main loci of his theology. So while we shall be considering what, for example, Calvin has to say about the soul and its powers, and while in his view this forms part of the *imago dei*, we shall not consider how Calvin understood the *imago dei*. Whether he understood it in ontological, or ethical, or relational terms, or in some of each, are properly the concern of the theologian.

This material is organized in a way that will be more immediately familiar to philosophers than to theologians. We shall examine certain aspects of Calvin's metaphysics, his doctrine of God, including its Trinitarian and Christological aspects, and divine providence; his doctrine of the human self, including human freedom; certain aspects of his epistemology, notably his pervasive appeal to accommodation and his use of the *sensus divinitatis*; his

[20] Plantinga has frequently argued that the first responsibility of the Christian philosopher is not to present arguments for the reasonableness of his religious beliefs that will convince any rational man, but arguments that will establish for the Christian believer the reasonableness of taking the existence of God and many other theological claims as 'properly basic', claims he is entitled to believe without argument. 'The Christian will of course suppose that belief in God is entirely proper and rational; if he does not accept this belief on the basis of other propositions, he will conclude that it is basic for him and quite properly so. Followers of Bertrand Russell and Madelyn Murray O'Hare may disagree; but how is that relevant? Must my criteria, or those of the Christian community, conform to their examples? Surely not. The Christian community is responsible to *its* sets of example, not to theirs.' 'Reason and Belief in God', in Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (eds.), *Faith and Rationality* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 77. See also Alvin Plantinga, 'Advice to Christian Philosophers', *Faith and Philosophy*, (1984).

treatment of divine power and goodness, and the way in which his understanding of angels throws light on this; and his ethics, particularly his appeal to natural law and the use to which he puts it in his ethics, and his underlying appeal to equity. Only the chapter on the atonement will at first seem to be more exclusively theological, but even there I shall be more concerned with Calvin's understanding of divine freedom and his handling of the issues of causation, time, and change than with the substantive theological issues themselves. Attention will also be paid to the logical consistency of Calvin's thought, both in the sense in which its disparate strands may be shown to cohere as well as with the question of the extent to which Calvin himself thinks that logical consistency is an important theological virtue.

Even when looking at his ideas philosophically we shall find that Calvin takes for granted matters that a contemporary philosophical theologian might find important, such as an account of divine omnipotence or of divine omniscience. For example, in his treatment of predestination he notes that to God's knowledge there is nothing future or past, but all things are present.[21] In eternity there is no before or after.[22] In his treatment of the Trinity, he upholds a notion of divine simplicity,[23] believing (with the mainstream Christian tradition) that God is both without parts but yet tri-personal. In his discussion of necessity, he emphasizes that the necessity of God's goodness does not detract from its praiseworthiness,[24] the precise issue that has been the subject of numerous discussions in contemporary philosophical theology.[25]

There are principally two reasons for Calvin's relative disinterest in several of what are currently regarded as central ideas in philosophical theology. First, he did not question the theological tradition unless he had what he regarded as very good reason. For instance, if we compare his attitude to the idea of divine omnipotence, say, to that of human merit, we find that he inherits theories of each, accepts the former without demur, but subjects the latter to withering analysis and refutation. Secondly, Calvin never forgot that the *Institutes* was not a textbook or a *summa* but a manual of instruction in the Christian faith for believers, which set him against anything that would distract him from this task. So the *Institutes* is not a full system of theology, a textbook in which every locus is given equal weight, but an 'occasional' writing. We shall attempt to respect these contours of Calvin's thought, attempting to look at his own concerns in his own terms, rather than trying to press his ideas into an alien theological mould.

[21] *Inst.* III. 21. 5. [22] *Inst.* I. 13. 8. [23] *Inst.* I. 13. 2, 16–19. [24] *Inst.* II. 3. 5.

[25] e.g. Thomas V. Morris, 'Duty and Divine Goodness', in Thomas V. Morris (ed.), *The Concept of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

In the popular mind and to some extent even in the scholarly mind Calvin had only one theological idea, the idea of predestination. Obsessed with this, the central dogma of his system, he made it function as an axiom from which all of his other ideas are derived. I intend the plural 'ideas' used in the book's title to repudiate this way of thinking about Calvin. Calvin had numerous theological ideas, each of which he believed to be derived from or endorsed by Scripture, and each one of which he believed to be consistent with each of the others. In order to underline this point further, no discussion of predestination is included in the book.

We ought not to infer from Calvin's neglect of a topic such as God's nature or natural theology that it was not important to him.[26] We need to contrast what Calvin gives prominence to because it is controversial and needs settling in order to carry forward the project of the Reformation, and what is intellectually central to his system of thought, even though he may be relatively silent on it. For example, he says little or nothing about the idea of creation, but it is nevertheless clear that he regards *creatio ex nihilo* as absolutely crucial, along with the corollary that all truths about the creation, whatever their proximate source, have their ultimate source in God.[27] If anything were a candidate for the axiom of Calvin's theology, then the following statement would be a strong contender:

> Not only does he [God] sustain this universe (as he once founded it) by his boundless might, regulate it by his wisdom, preserve it by his goodness, and especially rule mankind by his righteousness and judgment, bear with it in his mercy, watch over it by his protection; but also that no drop will be found either of wisdom and light, or of righteousness or power or rectitude, or of genuine truth, which does not flow from him, and of which he is not the cause.[28]

But in fact nothing is axiomatic for Calvin in this sense. Reasoning *more geometrico* was not his style.

In most of my chapters Calvin's relation to his medieval antecedents is explored and even stressed. Yet this is not to be understood as implying any diminution of Calvin's distinctiveness as a theologian of the Reformation. In order to underline this point, and to end the book on this note, the final chapter is concerned with Calvin's understanding of the central Reformation idea of *sola fide*. I try to show how Calvin uses distinctions about causation that come to him from Aristotle via the medievals to elucidate his distinctive

[26] Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, 115. In order to form an overall estimate of Calvin's treatment of natural theology, in addition to the much-discussed passages in book 1 of the *Institutes*, Calvin's treatment of biblical texts such as Acts 17 should also be consulted. See ch. 8 of the present work for an assessment of this material.

[27] *Inst.* II. 2. 15. See also Calvin's brief treatment of the eternity of matter in his commentary on Acts 17.

[28] *Inst.* I. 2. 1.

Reformation claims about the role of faith in salvation; and I compare his views to the revisionary position of Karl Barth. So in endeavouring to set out Calvin's ideas it is my aim to work with them, not only by placing them within a spectrum of other ideas, but also by making them interact with past and contemporary discussions on similar themes.

6

Free Will

ALTHOUGH John Calvin was not primarily a philosopher the previous chapters have demonstrated that his work as a theologian was undertaken with considerable awareness of philosophical ideas and arguments. Sometimes Calvin consciously and deliberately distances himself from particular philosophers and at other times warns against the excesses of philosophical speculation.[1] But he never fails to see the influence and significance of philosophical concepts, and warmly endorses certain ideas and arguments that he finds, for example, in Cicero and in Plato.[2] Although he rarely, if ever, uses a philosopher as a primary source of ideas, he does appeal to them for confirmation,[3] thus falsifying the claim made by some theologians that Calvin was a purely scriptural thinker whose thought was uncontaminated by pagan influence even when that thought was mediated by the medieval tradition[4] and by Renaissance humanism.[5] While Calvin echoed some of the features of the Renaissance critique of scholasticism, his practice shows that in his case this critique did not amount to a blanket rejection of the medieval way of doing theology, with its characteristic interplay of philosophical and theological issues.

In placing a positive value on the best of pagan thought Calvin followed his mentor Augustine of Hippo, but as we noted in the previous chapter he also, like Augustine, regards such thought as seriously flawed in the moral power it ascribes to the human will.[6] In his controversy with the Pelagians, Augustine came to hold that no human being can presently motivate himself to perform actions which are morally good in the sense of being meritorious and pleasing to God. Nor can a person by his own effort of will turn himself to God. Indeed each thinker regarded the rejection of these two claims as

[1] *Inst.* I. 15. 6.

[2] *Inst.* I. 3. 1; I. 3. 3; I. 15. 6. Charles Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy*, has a full survey of Calvin's philosophical connections.

[3] As in the case of Cicero, whose views in *The Nature of the Gods* Calvin cites as confirmation of his own view about the universality of the *sensus divinitatis* (*Inst.* I. 3. 2).

[4] As in *Inst.* II. 2. 5.

[5] Such a view surprisingly ignores the fact that Calvin's first published work was a commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia* (trans. and ed. as *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia* by F. L. Battles and A. M. Hugo (Leiden: Brill, 1969)).

[6] *Inst.* II. 2–3.

evidence of one of the more unfortunate and powerful influences of pagan thought on Christianity.[7]

So Calvin's views on the freedom and bondage of the will must be understood in the context of the long medieval tradition of debate about this complex of issues, and particularly in the light of the thought of one of the fountainheads of that tradition, Augustine of Hippo and (as we saw in the previous chapter) of Bernard of Clairvaux. Discussion and evaluation of his views on the bondage of the will provide us with further insight into his metaphysics of the human person.

This chapter focuses on Calvin's major work *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*.[8] Published in 1543, it is a reply to the first six books of the Louvain theologian Albertus Pighius's *Ten Books on Human Free Choice and Divine Grace*, published in 1542, which were an attack on Calvin's views as these are expressed in the 1539 edition of the *Institutes*, particularly chapter 2, 'The Knowledge of Humanity and Free Choice'.[9] As part of the later Bolsec controversy Calvin responded to the last four books of Pighius's work nine years later, in his *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (even though Pighius had in the meantime died).[10] *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will* can be regarded as an expansion and re-presentation of what Calvin says in the 1539 edition of the *Institutes*. A. N. S. Lane, in his excellent notes to the first English translation of the former work, never suggests that Calvin deviates from his teaching in the *Institutes* in his reply to Pighius, nor would he have been correct to do so.

Calvin would probably have been displeased with the title of this chapter for reasons I shall give. I shall then attempt to expound the main features of Calvin's views, and, in particular to separate carefully what Calvin himself called the 'two issues', the issues of God's providence over all, and the will's bondage, that he believes are liable to be confused together when human willing is discussed.[11] These issues are separate for Calvin because divine

[7] *Inst.* II. 2. 3.

[8] *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, ed. A. N. S. Lane, trans. G. I. Davies (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1996).

[9] There is no published English translation of the 1539 edition of the *Institutes*, but the Battles translation of the definitive 1559 edition indicates which passages are parts of the 1539 edition, which are re-writes, and which are entirely new passages. In what follows I shall refer mainly to passages of the first type in giving Calvin's views.

[10] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (1552), trans. J. K. S. Reid (London: James Clarke, 1961).

[11] In view of Calvin's explicit and repeated concern to distinguish between 'two issues' it is surprising that it is sometimes said that it is because Calvin fails to distinguish different 'perspectives' that he fails to achieve a harmonious and consistent position on the question of free will. (See Marijn de Kroon, *The Honour of God and Human Salvation: Calvin's Theology According to his Institutes*, trans. J. Vriend and

providence is not temporally indexed, and providential control is indeed a necessary power of God. For Calvin cannot contemplate a world created by God in which he fails to have control over every event in that world. (He frequently contrasts his view of providence with that of the Epicureans.) By contrast, the bondage of the will to sin has been brought voluntarily by mankind on itself; it was not always thus.

No doubt there are two issues here. I shall argue, however, that Calvin cannot altogether avoid connecting them when dealing with the bondage and liberation of the will. But since my main aim is to try to understand what Calvin taught in *Bondag*e rather than to engage in a critical discussion of it, or in a historical comparison or evaluation of it, the remainder of the chapter will be devoted to that.

'Free Will'

Calvin would have disliked this chapter's title because he did not like the adjective 'free' (*liberum*) being applied to the noun 'will' (*arbitrium*).

> Now as far as the term ('freedom') is concerned I still maintain what I declared in my *Institutes*, that I am not so excessively concerned about words as to want to start an argument for that cause, provided that a sound understanding of the reality is retained. If freedom is opposed to coercion, I both acknowledge and consistently maintain that choice is free, and I hold anyone who thinks otherwise to be a heretic. If, I say, it were called free in the sense of not being coerced nor forcibly moved by an external impulse, but moving of its own accord, I have no objection. The reason I find this epithet unsatisfactory is that people commonly think of something quite different when they hear or read it being applied to the human will. Since in fact they take it to imply ability and power, one cannot prevent from entering the minds of most people, as soon as the will is called free, the illusion that it therefore has both good and evil within its power, so that it can by its own strength choose either one of them.[12]

Calvin believed that one effect of sin was to breed illusions in the human mind, and that no illusion was more pernicious than that of the supposed freedom of the will. So he continues:

Lyle D. Bierma (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2001), 46–7.) For Calvin clearly distinguishes between God's providence over all, and human fallenness, and in any case there does not seem to be an inconsistency between what he says about the nature of human action and the consequences of human fallenness.

[12] *Bondage*, 68. Unlike Calvin, Peter Martyr Vermigli seems to have been willing to permit the phrase *liberum arbitrium*, provided that it is not misunderstood. 'We are not to contend about the word, and may allow *liberum arbitrium* so long as it is the same as *voluntas*, and that freedom in spiritual matters is not attributed to it. We also take the will to be free only through grace; otherwise it is a slave.' 'Free Will', in *The Peter Martyr Library*, vol. 4: *The Philosophical Works*, trans. Joseph C. McClelland, 284.

But since Pighius is always craftily confusing coercion with necessity, when it is of the greatest importance for the issue under discussion that the distinction between them be maintained and carefully remembered, it is appropriate to note how the following four [claims] differ from one another: namely that the will is free, bound, self-determined, or coerced. People generally understand a free will to be one which has it in its power to choose good or evil, and Pighius also defines it in this way. There can be no such thing as a coerced will, since the two ideas are contradictory. But our responsibility as teachers requires that we say what it means, so that it may be understood what coercion is. Therefore we describe [as coerced] the will which does not incline this way or that of its own accord or by an internal movement of decision, but is forcibly driven by an external impulse. 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, finally, is one which because of its corruptness is held captive under the authority of evil desires, so that it can choose nothing but evil, even if it does so of its own accord and gladly, without being driven by any external impulse.[13]

These passages echo the following passage from the *Institutes*:

Indeed, I abhor contentions about words, with which the church is harassed to no purpose. But I have scrupulously resolved to avoid those words which signify something absurd, especially where pernicious error is involved. But how few men are there, I ask, who when they hear free will attributed to man do not immediately conceive him to be master of both his own mind and will, able of his own power to turn himself toward either good or evil?[14]

Calvin does not deny that a good sense may be given to the phrase 'free will'. It is the liberty to choose between alternatives, a characteristic of intelligent agents, the absence of which indicates psychological coercion or the application of external force. Yet he is convinced that even when we have been at pains to give it this sense when people hear 'free will' they will continue to think of a will that has unrestricted power to choose either good or evil courses of action. It is precisely in this sense that Calvin denies that men and women possess free will.

There is another complicating factor, though this is not brought out explicitly by Calvin. It is that he uses two words, *voluntas* and *arbitrium*, usually translated 'will' and 'choice' respectively, and another word for choice, *electio*. *Voluntas* has to do with the deep-seated 'set' of the will, its basic orientation, for Calvin its basic orientation either to the service of God or in rebellion against him. The words translated 'choice' refer to the occasions of choice between alternatives. One way of putting Calvin's basic points about free will is to say that the power to choose (*electio*, *arbitrium*) remains intact except where a person is compelled, but that it is misleading

[13] *Bondage*, 69 [14] *Inst.* II. 2. 7.

to call such a power of choice 'free will'. But as a result of the Fall the *voluntas* is not free, it is orientated to serve the creature rather than the Creator and can only be reorientated by God's grace. Because of this the choices that are the expression of the fallen *voluntas*, though they are genuine choices, can never be well-motivated choices of what is good, and so are not free. If it is true that Calvin did not put the point in this way himself, as it seems to be, then this is rather surprising.[15]

The sense of free will which Calvin denies to be possessed by men and women is, as philosophers nowadays would say, indexed in its character. Men and women do not 'naturally' possess free will (in this sense) *now*, in the present post-lapsarian state of the human race. The race once did possess it, in unfallen Adam, but the race having fallen, free will in this sense is gone, and is irrecoverable apart from divine grace.

So there is a short, sharp answer to the question 'Does Calvin believe in free will?' Yes, he believes that we have on appropriate occasions the power to choose between alternatives in a way which is uncoerced. No, he does not believe that we naturally possess free will in the sense of the power to choose what is good, at present; but yes, unfallen man had free will in that sense. We do not possess such free will now, and so Calvin's advice is that we had better not use the phrase about ourselves lest, by using it to affirm specific human powers that we do not possess, we flatter ourselves that we possess the power to choose either good or evil.

The distinction between power of free choice which we retain though fallen, the sense of 'free' which Calvin is reluctant to use because of its misleading connotations, and the sense of 'free' in which a person is freed by grace to do the good, is well brought out by Thomas Aquinas, even though he does not use the idea of freedom in so many words:

> Man is the master of his acts, including those of willing and of not willing, because of the deliberative activity of his reason, which can be turned to one side or the other. But that he should deliberate or not deliberate, supposing that we were master of this too, would have to come about by a preceding deliberation. And since this may not proceed to infinity, one would finally have to reach the point at which man's free decision is moved by some external principle superior to the human mind, namely by God, as Aristotle himself demonstrated. Thus the mind even of a healthy man is not so much the master of its acts as not to need to be moved by God. Much more the

[15] In this connection it is a pity that in *Bondage* the terms *sponta* and *spontanea* are translated 'of its own accord' and 'self-determined' respectively, since in current philosophical usage 'self-determined' describes a version of indeterminism whereas 'liberty of spontaneity' (current in the 18th cent. and still occasionally used) refers to the sort of liberty that is compatible with determinism. To philosophical ears to translate *spontanea* as 'self-determined' tends to prejudge the question of whether or not Calvin is a determinist of some sort.

free decisions of a man become weak after sin, which the spoiling of nature hinders from the good.[16]

Calvin tirelessly insists on the fact, against Pighius but with Augustine, that our present lack of free will is not part of our nature, but is a corruption of our nature. Indeed, Calvin does not hesitate to make use of scholastic terminology to make the point; the loss of free will is, he says, not a loss of part of the essence of human nature, but it is an accident.[17] As he puts it in the *Institutes*, human corruption 'is an adventitious quality which comes upon man rather than a substantial property which has been implanted from the beginning'.[18]

Calvin denied that we have free will (in the sense of having power to choose both good and evil) but, as we can learn from the passages already cited, he equally emphatically affirmed that the absence of free will in this sense does not entail coercion. *Bondage* includes a short Excursus, 'Coercion versus Necessity', that establishes the difference.[19] One corollary of the denial of free will is that there is a sense in which what a person wills he wills necessarily; his lack of free will means he cannot but will evil. We shall try to see more clearly what this means shortly. Yet for Calvin it does not follow from the denial of free will that what a person chooses is the result of coercion. The importance of the distinction for Calvin is that while acting out of necessity is consistent with being held responsible for the action, and being praised or blamed for it, being coerced is inconsistent with such praise or blame. In his criterion of praise and blame he explicitly follows Aristotle.

When Aristotle distinguished what is voluntary from its opposite, he defines the latter as τὸ βίᾳ ἢ δι' ἄγνοιαν γιγνόμενον, that is, what happens by force or through ignorance. There he defines as forced what has its beginning elsewhere, something to which he who acts or is acted upon makes no contribution (*Ethic. Ni.* 3. 1).[20]

So normal human activity is not forced or coerced; insofar as it proceeds from fallen human nature it is not free because a person with a fallen nature does not have the power to choose what is good. Being fallen, his nature is modified and he chooses, and can choose, only what is evil.

How is this modification to be understood? Once more, in answer to this question, Calvin resorts to a scholastic distinction.

[16] *Summa Theologiae*, I. 2ae, 109. 3, trans. Cornelius Ernst.

[17] *Bondage*, 213. [18] *Inst.* II. 1. 11. [19] *Bondage*, 146–50. Cf. *Inst.* II. 2. 7.

[20] *Bondage*, 150. 'Those things, then, are thought involuntary, which take place by force or owing to ignorance; and that is compulsory of which the moving principle is outside, being a principle in which nothing is contributed by the person who acts—or rather is acted upon, e.g. if he were to be carried somewhere by a wind, or by men who had him in their power' (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross, revised by J. L. Ackrill and J. O. Urmson (Oxford University Press, 1980), 48).

Or is Pighius still so uneducated as not to recognise anything in between the substance of the will, or the faculty of willing, and its actions or its actual effects? He has certainly disappointed me enormously. For I thought that he was trained in at least the first principles of logic. Now I see that he is completely bereft of education and of common sense. Since no one is so unlearned as not to set habit in between. For what is the point of these forms of speech, 'someone of a good or evil mind', if not to indicate this quality? Nor indeed did I fail to mention this. For in relation to the present issue, following Bernard I proposed three things for consideration: to will per se, that is, simply to will; then to will badly; and [to will] well. The first is the faculty of willing or, if preferred, the substance. To will well and badly are qualities or opposed habits which belong to the power itself.[21]

The Fall thus resulted in the loss of the habit—or, in our terms, ability, to will well.

Pighius tried to force Calvin into the position of maintaining that if one supposes the absence of free will as Calvin did, then it is impossible for a person's reason and will to be changed 'unless the substance of the rational soul itself were also removed, and a new, different soul entered in its place';[22] that is, unless the person concerned became a numerically different person. But Pighius had overlooked the fact that though the soul's powers are essential to it, those powers can have accidental qualities. 'Our power of reasoning, which has its seat in the mind, and our ability to will, which resides in the heart, are both defective and corrupted by sin.'[23]

The point can be illustrated in the following way. It is part of a ferret's nature to climb through pipes and down holes, but it is not part of a greyhound's nature to do this. To be in bondage to sin is not a part of human nature in this sense. To be in bondage is, according to Calvin, an accident of human nature, brought about by the Fall, like a ferret being blinded and so not being able to locate pipes and holes even though his nature as a burrower remains.

The bondage of the will to sin consists precisely in the fact that the already chosen end cannot now be unchosen, since for Calvin (as we saw in the previous chapter) part of the penalty of having made a wrong choice about 'heavenly things' is that the capacity for making right choices about such things is taken away. We shall explore the nature of this incapacity later on.

So, in summary, Calvin denies that we now possess free will in the sense defined; nevertheless many of our actions are unforced, and all these unforced actions proceed from a sinful *habitus* of the soul, that (unlike the understanding and the will) is a contingent feature of the soul, possessed by all who are fallen, and which its possessors are unable to rid themselves of by their own unaided powers. We are to be blamed for those actions proceeding

[21] *Bondage*, 209. [22] *Bondage*, 213. [23] *Bondage*, 213.

from this evil *habitus*, as all our actions do prior to the onset of God's regenerating grace, which results in the creation of a new *habitus* of the soul.

Calvin and the modern debate about 'freedom'

Philosophical debate about human freedom since the time of Calvin has divided the conceptual cake somewhat differently. Emphasis has generally fallen on that sense (or those senses) having to do with coerced and uncoerced action, and the sense (or senses) in which the will is free from causal determinism, and not on moral senses of freedom. We must bear this in mind when the term 'freedom' is used in the next few paragraphs as we endeavour to match Calvin's views of coerced and uncoerced action (which he thought did not concern the real issue of 'free will'), with this subsequent discussion of freedom and determinism.

Particularly since the rise of modern science and of naturalistic views of the human person there has been an almost but not quite exclusive preoccupation with freedom and causal determinism. Modern debate has centred around two different conceptions of human action; on one account, a free act is one where only necessary causal conditions are outside the self, and the agent himself is the cause. Freedom is then the liberty to do otherwise than one does in precisely the same circumstances. The other main account finds freedom to be consistent with determinism, because it is necessary and sufficient for an act being free that the person did it, and wanted to do it, even though there exists in principle a causally sufficient explanation of what was done.

It is perhaps anachronistic to attempt to place Calvin's views on coerced and uncoerced action exactly in the terms of this later debate; nevertheless, I shall attempt roughly to do this. We have already noted that his account of providence appears to commit Calvin to a pluralistic or hierarchical kind of determinism. I intend this to supplement that earlier discussion.

On its surface the evidence for whether Calvin favours a form of determinism looks inconclusive. On the one hand, Calvin speaks unreservedly of the self-determination of the will. '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.'[24] Initially this language may seem to place Calvin in the libertarian or agent–causation camp. But Calvin would appear to be redefining the idea of self-determination at this point since the will is 'led', though in an uncoerced fashion. Indeed his favoured position is to speak of freedom (though not the sense of 'freedom' that he favours, as we have seen) as being the absence of coercion, and this appears to place him in the

[24] *Bondage*, 69.

compatibilist camp, where to act freely is to act according to your beliefs and desires, in an uncoerced way.

The evidence so far appears somewhat ambiguous. But there are two other strands of data that are relevant, and to which we must turn.

Calvin's language for regeneration

The first of these concerns the language that Calvin uses regarding the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. He uniformly sees the Spirit working in regeneration as a causal agent, and more importantly, as an effective or causally sufficient agent who produces a new *habitus* of the soul, and so provides the ability to will and do the good, albeit imperfectly. Calvin emphatically rejected what he took to be the Pelagianizing theology of Pighius, arguing against Pighius that the Spirit produces not only necessary conditions for good action, conditions which we could prepare ourselves to receive, and cooperate with when they occurred, but sufficient conditions for action which we cannot prepare ourselves for, or make more likely to occur, or unaidedly cooperate with. Nevertheless, despite this causal sufficiency, the Spirit does not compel the will but renews it.

> When the Lord says that he will cause us to walk in his precepts, he is not promising that he will merely render the heart capable of turning in either direction, so that it will be as ready and inclined to resist him as to obey. It is rather that, being entirely formed and prepared for obedience, it already has the righteousness of God impressed and engraved upon it. For no one is so dull-witted as not to see both Pighius's remarkable malice and his shameless and almost despairing rashness in restricting the grace of God here. The Lord says that he will cause us to serve him. [Pighius] renders it that he will make us able either to walk or not to walk [in his ways].[25]

And, again,

> We do not shrink from the customary manner of speaking whereby people are said to run and to strive and to labour—provided that it is not denied to us that, for the struggle and for the race (or labour), both the desire and the strength are also bestowed on them by the grace of God. Or, if it is more pleasing for our meaning to be expressed in the words of a prophet, we willingly allow that people act, but it is because God causes them so to do. [26]

Here, once again, the language of causal sufficiency is used. God causes people to act, and yet such people, in performing such actions, act in a self-determined and voluntary manner. Indeed insofar as they do good they act freely in the further sense of 'free' which Calvin reserves for properly motivated actions. This language strongly suggests a compatibilist position

[25] *Bondage*, 211. [26] *Bondage*, 236.

that argues that persons are free when they do what they want to do, even if their actions are caused by their desires and beliefs. For the Spirit produces a new *habitus* in the regenerate by producing new set of desires, (or of dispositions to desire) in them. Where men and women act prompted by such desires in Spirit-produced circumstances they 'own' their motives and the actions flowing from them in a significant and characteristic way.[27]

So far, then, the evidence inclines us to the view that although Calvin uses the language of self-determination he understands that language in a way that is consistent with the position known to modern philosophers as compatibilism, the compatibility of free will (in the sense that Calvin dislikes) with causal determinism.

Aquinas takes a position on free will that Calvin would generally endorse, despite the tendency of many modern commentators to place Aquinas in the indeterministic camp. Like Calvin, although he uses the language of self-determination (calling it 'free' in a way that Calvin would have disliked) what he says about freedom is hardly consistent with modern libertarianism.

> Free decision spells self-determination because man by his free decision moves himself into action. Freedom does not require that a thing is its own first cause, just as in order to be the cause of something else a thing does not have to be its first cause. God is the first cause on which both natural and free agents depend. And just as his initiative does not prevent natural causes from being natural, so it does not prevent voluntary action from being voluntary but rather makes it be precisely this. For God works in each according to its nature.[28]

Like Calvin, Aquinas believes that the possession of free will is tested by the relevance of exhortations. 'Man has free will; other wise counsels, exhortations, commands, prohibitions . . . would be in vain.' Here also he appears to endorse a compatibilist view of human freedom.

Also like Calvin, Aquinas (following Bernard) distinguishes between free will as a power and as a habit. 'A power enables a man to act, while a habit disposes him to act well or ill.' Further, 'A man is said to lose his liberty of decision by sin, not in the sense that it takes away the liberty he has by nature,

[27] On the idea of 'ownership' see Harry G. Frankfurt, 'Identification and Wholeness', in *Necessity, Vision and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[28] *Summa Theologiae*, I. 83. 1 (trans. Timothy Suttor). It is interesting to compare the wording of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647): '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 creature, nor is liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established' (III. 1); 'Although, in relation to the foreknowledge, and decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly, yet, by the same providence, he ordereth them to fall out according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently' (v. 2) (*Documents of the English Reformation*, ed. Gerald Bray (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1994), 490, 491).

for only coercion does that, but in that it takes away his freedom from guilt and unhappiness.'[29] Calvin also contrasts liberty and coercion but he thinks that sin takes away more than freedom from guilt and unhappiness; it removes the ability to will the good.

It may seem that, contrary to Calvin, Aquinas is here arguing that free will is 'indifferent to good or evil choice', and so endorsing (despite his other remarks) an indeterministic liberty of indifference. But Aquinas is here discussing the relation between will and habit and arguing that habits are what dispose the will in either a good or a bad direction. Like Calvin, and unlike Pighius, he is arguing that bad or good habits are contingently related to the will, not an essential part of it. Habits dispose us in either a good or a bad direction. So the will, as a principle of choice, is indifferent to good and evil. Considered merely as a power, it may choose either. It in fact chooses as it is disposed, either by an evil or a good habit. For Aquinas, then, free will is a power that is affected by the habits which it possesses, which is a position very similar, if not identical to, the one that Calvin endorses against Pighius.

However, there is one further line of argument that, if it is convincing, would allow for Calvin being an incompatibilist. Suppose we distinguish between actions of a certain *type*, and particular occurrences of actions of that type, particular *tokens* of the type. A certain type of action would be an action of a certain description, say, giving to the poor for the glory of God. On Calvin's view, as we have seen, only the Spirit, in liberation of the will and the production of a new *habitus* of the soul, can give to a person the capacity to perform actions of that type. So the Spirit's work is the causally sufficient condition for the production of certain action-types. But perhaps the Spirit is only a necessary condition of the production of tokens of that type. Suppose that you are in a walled rose garden that you can't escape from, perhaps a garden that you don't want to escape from. Then there are types of action that you can't perform tokens of. For example, you can't visit the Eiffel Tower or swim in the sea. But there are other action tokens that, if you possess libertarian freedom, you can choose between; for example, the action token of picking this white rose now or of picking this red rose now.

Is there evidence in *Bondage* that Calvin might favour such a view? Some evidence superficially seems to support it, or at least to be consistent with it. After noting that Pighius claims that 'the fruits of good works are technically produced by us and by the life-giving force which is in us', which we have received from God, Calvin goes on to say that:

> If [by this] he understands the will with which we will (which is implanted in us by nature), the judgment with which we choose, the power to endeavour with which

[29] *Summa Theologiae*, I. 83. 2.

we endeavour, I have no objection—provided that he allows at the same time that we acquire righteousness of will, judgment, and endeavour by grace alone.[30]

These remarks are compatible with the idea that God's grace extends to types of actions, but not to tokens of those types. In spite of this, however, Calvin seems generally to support the thesis that God's grace is necessary and sufficient for both action types and action tokens. For example, 'We do indeed teach that man is so acted upon by the grace of God that he nevertheless [also] acts at the same time, but he acts in such a way that the effectiveness of the action is and remains entirely in the control of the Spirit of God.'[31] Here Calvin seems to have both action types and action tokens in mind. And this is the point where (as we shall see shortly) the 'two issues' which Calvin endeavours to keep separate, the issue of divine providence and the issue of the bondage of the will to sin and its liberation, inevitably come together. As we saw in Chapter 4, Calvin believes in particular providence. God governs the occurrence of every action token. It is possible to combine a view making the grace of God necessary and sufficient for the production of any good action type but only necessary for the production of any good action token, with an act of indeterministically free choice being also necessary, but only if this is combined with a view of providence that does not extend God's providential control to every action token. But this cannot be Calvin's view, for on his view God does exercise providential control over every action token.[32]

The 'Two Issues'

The second and final strand of evidence in favour of a compatibilist understanding of human agency is from what Calvin calls the 'different issue'.

[30] *Bondage*, 230.

[31] *Bondage*, 172. Compare Peter Martyr Vermigli, 'Nor is it within our capacity to be content with what is set before us; they must be proposed with force, efficacy and power, so that the understanding may be affected with an uncommon light, and the will strengthened lest it submit to evil desires and temptations that call it away from spiritual things. When this is done it assents to the words and promises of God, and justification follows. The intellect is actively predisposed to such assent, willing and agreeing to what is proposed; but it remains passive toward that power of God, the force and efficacy which heals and converts it; for through him all this is received and comes about.' 'Free Will', in *Peter Martyr Vermigli, Philosophical Works*, trans. J. C. McClelland, 285.

[32] As we have noted, in developing his account of particular providence Calvin shows awareness of both Epicureanism, with its emphasis upon chance, and of Stoic fate, and develops his own view in a way which self-consciously mediates between these two extremes. On this, see Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy*, part 3.

In at least two places in *Bondage* Calvin accuses Pighius of mixing up two different issues:

> I could wish that I had an opponent who would attack me from every side but not rush at me in a blind and confused combat as this man does, for, having resolved to discuss two different issues separately, he now mixes them up together. He says: If even to think anything good or evil is in nobody's power, but everything happens by 'absolute necessity'. . . . But he has undertaken to deal with the providence of God, on which this necessity depends, elsewhere, and this is just what he does in the last four books of his work. Why then does he now mix up this issue with the other one? Let him say whatever he has to say, even if it is weak, even if it is worthless; if only he will stay in one place, I will let him say it.[33]

And later, 'As for the necessary or chance occurrence of events, I prefer not to touch on this at the present time, lest by entwining different topics I confuse the order of my discourse.'[34]

As we have seen, Calvin deliberately separates his reply to Pighius's first six books from his reply to the remaining four books, which is clear evidence that in Calvin's mind these two sections of the work deal with different issues.

In stressing the separateness of the 'two issues' Calvin may also have had in mind the thought that in his *The Bondage of the Will* Martin Luther had brought the two issues rather indiscriminately together. Part of Luther's cumulative case against Erasmus's view of the will's liberty was not only that the will was in bondage to sin but also that God's foreknowledge of all events necessitates the occurrence of those events. Luther had said: 'It is, then, fundamentally necessary and wholesome for Christians to know that God foreknows nothing contingently, but that He foresees, purposes and does all things according to His own immutable, eternal and infallible will. This bombshell knocks "free-will" flat, and utterly shatters it.'[35]

But there is reason to think that the relationship between the two Reformers has been misunderstood at this point. It is not obvious that Calvin wants to 'put clear water' between himself and Luther on this issue or that he was either annoyed or embarrassed by Luther's views.[36] For both Luther and Calvin refer to the scholastic distinction between the necessity of the consequent (*necessitas consequentis*) and the necessity of the consequence (*necessitas consequentiae*) in connection with the will of God. Luther, in

[33] *Bondage*, 35.

[34] *Bondage*, 172.

[35] Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (London: James Clarke, 1957), 80.

[36] These claims are made by A. N. S. Lane in his introduction to Calvin's *Bondage and the Liberation of the Will*, xxiii.

typical fashion, claims that as far as the will of God is concerned the distinction is one without a difference.

> So their absurd formula, *all things take place by necessity of consequence, but not by necessity of the thing consequent*, amounts merely to this: everything takes place by necessity, but the things that take place are not God Himself. But what need was there to tell us that?—as though there were any fear of our claiming that things which happen are God, or possess a divine and necessarily existent nature! So our original proposition still stands and remains unshaken; all thing take place by necessity.[37]

That is, since no one wishes to affirm that everything that happens does so by metaphysical necessity, the distinction between the necessity of the consequent and the necessity of the consequence is inapplicable in this case. All things are necessary, but they are so in virtue of the will of God.

Whether or not Luther is justified in calling the distinction 'absurd' is another matter. Calvin certainly does not agree with him in this judgement. As we noted in the discussion of providence, Calvin is more respectful of the distinction between the two sorts of necessity itself, claiming that although he shrinks from the received forms of speech, and the distinction between absolute and consequential necessity, this is only so that 'no subtlety of reasoning might prevent the simplest reader from understanding and acknowledging the truth of what I testify'.[38] But each of the Reformers argues that the will of God necessitates things, each denies that God is subject to fate, and that the necessity of what occurs is a necessity unrelated to the will of God. The only material difference is that Calvin wishes to hold to the separateness of the 'two issues' while Luther combines them in his cumulative case for the bondage of the will. But his substantive position is the same as Luther's: nothing happens but by the will of God; hence the will of God necessitates everything. But the will of God is contingent, since 'to take contingency out of the world altogether would be absurd'.[39] He puts this clearly in the following remarks in the *Institutes*:

> Not always does a like reason appear, but we ought undoubtedly to hold that whatever changes are discerned in the world are produced from the secret stirring of God's hand. But 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

[37] Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 82.

[38] *The Secret Providence of God*, 235.

[39] *The Secret Providence of God*, 234.

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.[40]

Bones do not break of necessity, yet it could have happened naturally that the bones of Christ broke, as it happened naturally that he ate and slept. But God had determined otherwise. And so in virtue of the will of God Christ's bones, though naturally fragile, were in fact incapable of being broken. So God's will is the 'highest and first cause of all things'. In this sense it is 'absolute'. But this does not mean that the things that occur do so with the necessity which God himself has. Calvin is at pains to stress that this is not the case. Further, it does not follow that because men and women in bondage to sin necessarily sin that this necessity is the same necessity as that by which all events fall under the will of God. Calvin generally wishes to reserve the discussion of this latter sense of necessity for when he discusses providence, in what he intended at that time to be a separate book discussing the last four chapters of Pighius's work.

For we do not say that the wicked sin of necessity in such a way as to imply that they sin without wilful and deliberate evil intent. The necessity comes from the fact that God accomplishes his work, which is sure and steadfast, through them. At the same time, however, the will and purpose to do evil which dwells within them makes them liable to censure. But, it is said, they are driven and forced to this by God. Indeed, but in such a way that in a single deed the action of God is one thing and their own action is another. For they gratify their evil and wicked desires, but God turns this wickedness so as to bring his judgments to execution. This subject is one that I am touching on lightly with, as it were, only a brief mention, since elsewhere it will have to be treated at greater length and with more attention.[41]

This brief discussion of his position, depending as it does for its articulation on the scholastic distinction between God the primary cause and human beings as secondary causes, makes it clear that Calvin's view of predestination (a corollary of his view of providence) may not from a strictly logical point of view require a compatibilist understanding of human freedom. For it is possible to hold both to predestination and to libertarian human freedom, providing one sufficiently emphasizes the inscrutability and incomprehensibility of such an arrangement. Nevertheless it is obvious that Calvin's view of providence and compatibilism go naturally together.

So, on balance, considering both Calvin's explicit statements about the nature of human bondage and liberation together with his view of providence and predestination, we may say that his view *favours* a compatibilist view of human action, even if it does not *entail* it, and that it would perhaps

[40] *Inst.* 1. 16. 9. [41] *Bondage of the Will*, 37–8.

be anachronistic to press his texts too far in an attempt to answer questions that only developed later in western culture.

Yet while Calvin holds that God ordains all events and determines many of them, he does not hold that he determines all of them if to determine means to 'efficiently cause'. For God cannot efficiently cause evil actions, or, at least, he cannot cause evil actions for evil reasons, since God cannot do evil, and so a fortiori he cannot will evil; at least, not *as* evil.[42] In contrast with many scholastics, Calvin does not deploy the privative notion of evil at this point, because as we have seen he does not favour that notion.

The Bondage of the Will—how are we to Understand it?

So far we have focused on Calvin's teaching on the metaphysics of human action. While the preponderance of modern philosophical discussion on human freedom is concerned with the freedom–causal determinism issue, other discussions may throw light on what Calvin was saying on *Bondage*'s chief topic, the moral corruption of the human person and his liberation through grace. These discussions may provide us with tools that will enable us to clarify further what Calvin and his mentor Augustine of Hippo meant by the bondage of the will and its liberation.

Calvin rejects what might be called the 'pagan' or philosophical account of the bondage of the will as part of his general case against pagan ethics, which is that it presents too rosy a picture of human moral capabilities. With regard to moral and spiritual matters the philosophers are 'blinder than moles',[43] they regard the acquiring of virtue as a ground for pride,[44] they are ignorant of the new birth.[45] But Calvin's most basic criticism of pagan philosophers and those Christians unduly influenced by them, is that in their analysis of free will and virtue and vice 'they were seeking in a ruin for a building'.

> Hence the great obscurity faced by the philosophers, for they were seeking in a ruin for a building, and in scattered fragments for a well-knit structure. They held this principle, that man would not be a rational animal unless he possessed free choice of good and evil; also it entered their minds that the distinction between virtues and vices would be obliterated if man did not order his life by his own planning. Well reasoned so far—if there had been no change in man. But since this was hidden from them, it is no wonder they mix up heaven and earth![46]

One consequence of this is that they have deficient views of human fallenness; not surprisingly, for they have no concept of a Fall. In *Inst.* II. 2. 2 Calvin

[42] Here is one important respect in which Calvin's determinism, if that is what it is, differs from modern naturalism in which the causes of our actions are mechanistic, not teleological.

[43] *Inst.* II. 2. 18. [44] *Inst.* III. 7. 2. [45] *Inst.* III. 7. 1. [46] *Inst.* I. 15. 8.

repeatedly inveighs against 'the philosophers' (they are referred to five or six times in two short sections)[47] and their view of the 'bondage of the senses' (*servitutem sensus*). The philosophers in question seem to be Plato and Aristotle though he does not mention them by name. The bondage of the senses is the captivity of the understanding to the senses. On this account the appetite havers between obeying the reason and obeying the senses. If the appetite 'subjects itself to the bondage of the senses, it is so corrupted and perverted by the latter as to degenerate into lust'. But Calvin is particularly concerned at the way in which Christians such as Peter Lombard, who do have the concept of the Fall, have nevertheless adopted such a superficial view.

> These philosophers consequently declare that the understanding is endowed with reason, the best ruling principle for the leading of a good and blessed life, provided it sustains itself within its own excellence and displays the strength bestowed upon it by nature. But they state that the lower impulse, called 'sense', by which man is drawn off into error and delusion is such that it can be tamed and gradually overcome by reason's rod.[48]

This is too superficial for Calvin because it places the source of 'bondage' in the senses alone, when for Calvin 'Not only did a lower appetite seduce him [Adam], but unspeakable impiety occupied the very citadel of his mind, and pride penetrated to the depths of his heart. Thus it is pointless and foolish to restrict the corruption that arises thence only to what are called the impulses of the senses.'[49] 'The whole man is overwhelmed—as by a deluge—from head to foot, so that no part is immune from sin and all that proceeds from him is to be imputed to sin.'[50]

So fallen humankind is in bondage to sin. I want to clarify the way in which, for Calvin, sin imposes restrictions on the range of a person's choice, restrictions of a kind that warrant his view that there are certain things a sinful person cannot do, even though that person is not compelled to do what he does. In other words, I want to do justice to what we might call the *modalities* of the action of the person who is in bondage to sin, while still maintaining Calvin's insistence that such actions are voluntary and not the result of external coercion. The bondage of which Calvin speaks is not like the bondage that results from physical imprisonment, nor is it a craving of a purely physical kind, like the craving for water or alcohol.

We might initially think that the bondage of the will consists in having desires of a certain intensity and strength, such that a person who is overcome by such desires cannot but fulfil them or cannot but fulfil them if physically unimpeded. We certainly use the language of force in describing

[47] *Inst.* II. 2. 2, 3. [48] *Inst.* II. 2. 2. [49] *Inst.* II. 1. 9. [50] *Inst.* II. 1. 9.

the operation of such intense desires; a person may be overcome by a desire, and we may say that in the circumstances he could not help doing what he did.

Yet there are several problems with this attempt to identify the modality of bondage with psychological, felt intensity, one being that of identifying in a non-circular way what the strength of a desire is; and another being that a person may have a strong desire for something that is relatively trivial and inconsequential in his life. This is significant for Calvin because bondage to sin is not trivial or inconsequential. A person may have an intense desire for a non-trivial end that he also strongly disapproves of having. But the most important problem is that it would imply that all sinful actions are psychologically compelled.

Probably the best prospect of making progress here is to distinguish between what contemporary philosophers call first-order and second-order desires.[51] Not only do we, as persons, desire certain things with varying degrees of intensity, we are able to take up attitudes to, and to possess desires about, those desires. Thus a person might want another cream cake but not want to want the cake; alternatively, he may want another cake and want to want it! In taking up the issue in this way I am not arguing or implying that one can thereby bypass the traditional determinism–free will debate, as Harry Frankfurt has been taken to be claiming.[52] I am using it simply for the purposes of trying to be clear on the modalities of Calvin's view of the bondage of the will and its liberation.

What is the difference between these two cases? Following Harry Frankfurt, I suggest that the difference lies in whether or not such a person *owns* or *identifies with* a particular first-order desire or range of desires. I may have a desire for a cream cake and not 'own' or 'identify with' the desire, and so be ashamed of or rueful at the fact of my desire. In that case, my second-order desire is not to have that particular first-order desire. On

[51] I am adapting this from Harry Frankfurt's papers 'Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person', in *The Importance of What We Care About*, 23, and 'Identification and Wholeness in *Necessity, Volition and Love*'. In 'Sanctification, Hardening of the Heart, and Frankfurt's Concept of Free Will', *Journal of Philosophy* (1988). Eleonore Stump develops Frankfurt's distinction and adapts it to illuminate features of Christian conversion, though not in a way which would, I think, have met with Calvin's approval. And in her 'Augustine on Free Will', while offering a hierarchical, Frankfurt-type account of Augustine's view of the will, she struggles somewhat unsuccessfully to interpret Augustine as a libertarian (Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)). John M. Fischer and Mark Ravizza present a plausible case for the consistency of such a hierarchical view of the self with compatibilism in their *Responsibility and Control* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[52] For a collection of papers relevant to this debate see John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza (eds.), *Perspectives on Moral Responsibility* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

the other hand, I may have a desire for a cream cake and 'own' the desire, experiencing no dissonance between my first-order and my second-order desires.

I suggest that for Calvin (and for Augustine, who was watching over Calvin's shoulder at points such as these) the voluntariness of the state of being in bondage to sin lies in this idea of ownership or identification, and not in the area of choice *ab initio*. On his view fallen men and women are born into the world already possessing a certain structure of desires that they then own; it is in their uncoerced and hence voluntary ownership of and identification with this structure that their responsibility before God, and their culpability, ultimately lie.

This is part of the picture. But, as I hope that my trivial example of the choosing of a cream cake indicates, for Calvin there is more to the will's bondage to sin than just this hierarchical structure. For one thing, the structure must cover matters of fundamental moral and spiritual importance. For Calvin, sin and righteousness concern the most central of issues, a person's relation to God. For another, what constitutes bondage is that the fundamental, non-trivial, second-order desires are stable and effective, that is, they carry through to willed courses of action. A person who is in bondage to sin is someone who owns and identifies with his desire to serve and worship the creature rather than the Creator and whose actions express this orientation appropriately. Let us look at each of these points in turn.

For Frankfurt a person is free if there is an alignment between what that person wants and what he wants to want. So that human freedom has a purely structural character. On Frankfurt's account Satan is free if his first- and second-order desires are in appropriate alignment. So for Calvin this point about structure can only be half the story. For the person in bondage to sin has his first- and second-order desires aligned, but because the desires are expressions of an unrighteous motive their alignment is not an expression of freedom but of bondage even though, as Calvin stresses, such a person does not recognize his bondage to sin for what it is. For Calvin one of the characteristics of such bondage is that it is self-deceiving. The course of life of a person in bondage seems right to him. This is the way he wants to go. He owns his second-order desire in the sense that it becomes a part of himself. But his course of action is in fact godless.

In the *Institutes* Calvin recognizes this in the following way. Commenting on a distinction made by Augustine he says:

> The chief point of this distinction, then, must be that man, as he was corrupted by the Fall, sinned willingly, not unwillingly or by compulsion; by the most eager inclination of his heart, not by forced compulsion; by the prompting of his own lust, not by compulsion from without. Yet so depraved is his nature that he can be moved

or impelled only to evil. But if this is true, then it is clearly expressed that man is surely subject to the necessity of sinning.[53]

The second element is implicit in the first but needs to be spelled out. In order for a person to be in bondage to sin, in Calvin's sense, he must not only want to have his desire to worship and serve the creature more than the Creator, but that second-order desire must be stable and strong, effective in making the corresponding first-order desire his will. It is not a second-order desire that is continually liable to frustration from competing second-order desires and which as a consequence only fitfully carries through to willed action.[54]

So the person in bondage to sin must be distinguished from the unwilling addict. The unwilling addict is in the grip of a physical craving such that his actions of a certain type are overdetermined. As a result of this overdetermination, the addict's first-order desires for the drug are impervious to any change in his second-order desires to desist from its use. He may want not to want the cigarette but his craving for it prevails. So there is a misalignment of first and second orders due to the overbearing strength of the first-order desire. While what Calvin regards as the uniformly evil life of a person in bondage to sin proceeds from a second-order desire that is wholly set upon the creature rather than the Creator, such a person is not in the physical grip of anything, nor is his first-order desire overdetermined. Were sin like such a physical addiction then it could be described as coercive. Rather, the action of the person in bondage to sin is determined by the character of his second-order desire, by its stability and centrality and by the fact that the person 'owns' that desire. (From what we saw earlier, Calvin would call this a habit of mind.) It must also be distinguished from the case of a person who vacillates from day to day over what he wants to want. Here there are periods of alignment, but no stability. Should the stable, fundamental second-order desire change—or be changed—by becoming weaker, or fitful, say, then such a change would be sufficient to bring about appropriate changes in first-order desires.

In this state of bondage to sin a person could say, using Martin Luther's words, 'Here I stand. I can do no other.' He 'stands' in adherence to a course of action that is wholly evil because it proceeds from a wholly evil motivation, and these words are not an expression of passivity in the face of coercion (as in 'I couldn't help letting the hot plate fall to the floor') but

[53] *Inst.* II. 3. 5.

[54] Frankfurt calls effective second-order desires 'volitions' and does not deal much with ineffective second-order desires. The development of the distinction between effective and ineffective second-order desires is due to Eleonore Stump, 'Sanctification, Hardening of the Heart, and Frankfurt's Concept of Free Will'.

of a directed 'internal' activity, directed from the most basic level of his personality.

So the modality, the necessity that is characteristic of the bondage, refers not to passivity in the face of external necessity but to the inability of a man in bondage to sin (at this stage in his career) to alter his second-order desire to worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator. He authoritatively identifies himself with such a course of life. Had such a person been physically or in other ways compelled to do what is good, then his inner self would or could have repudiated this.

Let us now turn our attention to the liberation of the man who is in bondage to sin.

Liberation

How does the person in bondage to sin, with his firm effective second-order desire to want to serve the creature, effect the transition and identify himself with an effective second-order desire to want to want to serve the Creator? How does a fundamental, authoritative, second-order desire about such a fundamental matter, a desire which the person owns or identifies with, come to be replaced by a second-order desire of the same fundamental character, but which is a desire to serve the Creator?[55]

In trying to answer these questions we confront a more general difficulty. An account of a transition from possessing one fundamental, effective desire to possessing a similar desire of an opposite kind, must involve the exercise of a new capacity, the capacity to break the effectiveness of the second-order desire to serve the creature and then to own and identify with the contrary desire to serve the Creator. A person who shares the theological views of Pighius must explain the transition by denying that sin is a form of bondage in Calvin's sense and then by saying that by an act of the will, assisted by divine grace, a person may come to possess the capacity to serve the Creator. By the same token he had the power to resist the proffered divine assistance. And so even as fallen he must possess freedom of will in the sense heartily repudiated by Calvin—freedom to choose between good and evil.

Although we have seen that at one important place in his argument Calvin appeals approvingly to Aristotle, there are other places where he appears to be less than complimentary to The Philosopher. Debating about the hardness

[55] Here it might be inquired whether a person who has a second-order desire owns and identifies with it. If so, do we not need to posit a third-order desire, and then a fourth-order desire, and so on *ad infinitum*? Interesting responses to this question are to be found in Harry Frankfurt, 'Three Concepts of Free Action', in *The Importance of What We Care About*, and by Eleonore Stump in 'Sanctification, Hardening of the Heart, and Frankfurt's Concept of Free Will'.

of the human heart and the need for grace, Calvin states 'Pighius declares that the hardness was incurred through bad habit. Just as if one of the philosophers' crew should say that by evil living a person had become hardened or callous towards evil.' Calvin's (and Augustine's) view is at odds with the Aristotelian idea—the idea of the 'philosophers' crew'—that we become just by doing just acts, prudent by doing prudent acts, brave by doing brave acts. It may be true, as Richard Swinburne says,[56] that 'other things being equal, each time one does something, the more natural doing it becomes. Doing an action of a certain kind frequently gives one the character of one who is naturally inclined to do actions of that kind.' But if, for example, being just is not simply a matter of habitually or spontaneously doing what is objectively just but also a matter of having the right motives and dispositions in doing so—if, in other words, we take a motivational view of ethical goodness, as Calvin and Augustine do—then the question is how we do the just thing in the first place, how we come to be remotivated to love justice. Calvin's answer is that we can only do a just act in the first place by having the *habitus* of our minds redirected, a redirecting that, at least in its first stages, must be done for and to us rather than our doing it.

There is reason to think that Calvin is not being quite fair to Aristotle here, if indeed he had Aristotle clearly in view.[57] For Aristotle does not only say, 'This then, is the case with the virtues also; by doing the acts that we do in our transactions with other men we become just or unjust, and by doing the acts that we do in the presence of danger, and by being habituated to feel fear or confidence, we become brave or cowardly.'[58] He also says:

> Again, the case of the arts and that of the virtues are not similar; for the products of the arts have their goodness in themselves, so that it is enough that they should have a certain character, but if the acts that are in accordance with the virtues have themselves a certain character it does not follow that they are done justly or temperately. The agent also must be in a certain condition when he does them; in the first place he must have knowledge, secondly he must choose the acts, and choose them for their own stakes, and thirdly his action must proceed from a firm and unchangeable character.[59]

There is plenty of scope here for Calvin to adapt Aristotle to his own view by claiming that a firm and unchangeable desire to be virtuous can only be brought about by the efficacious grace of God.

[56] *Atonement and Responsibility*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 32.

[57] He does not mention Aristotle by name and in the parallel treatment of the point in the *Institutes* the only philosopher he explicitly refers to is Cicero who Calvin believes thinks that we acquire virtue for ourselves and that we and not God are to be praised for it (*Inst.* II. 2. 3). Yet Calvin takes Cicero's opinion to be that of all philosophers.

[58] *The Nichomachean Ethics*, 19.

[59] *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 34. I was reminded of this point by Harry Bunting.

To Calvin it is unclear how someone who holds Pighius's view can explain how a fundamental, effective second-order desire to serve the creature can be supplanted by an appropriately fundamental, effective second-order desire to serve the Creator other than by saying that the second-order desire of the person in bondage is rendered ineffective by divine grace, and grace produces an effective second-order desire of the opposite kind.

So Calvin holds that a new, effective second-order desire—a new accidental property of the *habitus* of the soul, as he would put it—is created by the immediate work of the Spirit. This work of the Spirit, which may be instantaneous, does not necessarily register itself instantaneously on the consciousness but may initiate a conscious process of discernible stages. Perhaps if he were asked to illustrate such a process at work Calvin would refer to what happened to Augustine in the garden.

In his treatment of these matters in the *Institutes* it is in his characterization of liberation from sin rather than in his discussion of bondage to sin that Calvin's hierarchical view of the self becomes explicit. Writing of 'vivification' (*vivificatio*), the enlivening of the soul by the Holy Spirit, he says that it means 'the desire to live in a holy and devoted manner, a desire arising from rebirth; as if it were said that man dies to himself that he may begin to live to God'.[60] If a person dies to himself his fundamental, effective second-order desires are replaced by other effective second-order desires. Similarly, repentance is a 'departing from ourselves' in which 'we turn to God, and having taken off our former mind, we put on a new'.[61] The soul 'puts off its old nature'.[62] 'It is a very hard and difficult thing to put off ourselves and to depart from our inborn disposition.'[63] Who is the 'we' who puts off 'ourselves'? In Frankfurtian terms, the second-order fundamental desires constitute in each of us a 'self'. Calvin might say that Frankfurt is formalizing language that is familiar to the Christian from the writings of Paul in Romans 7, Ephesians 4, and elsewhere.

Earlier we pointed out that Calvin uses different words for the will, *voluntas*, *arbitrium*, *electio*. *Voluntas* is typically translated as 'will', *electio* and *arbitrium* as 'choice' or 'decision'. This can be illustrated from the following section of the Battles translation:

> Now we must examine the will [*voluntas*], upon which freedom of decision [*arbitrii libertas*] especially depends; for we have already seen that choice [*electionem*] belongs to the sphere of the will rather than to that of the understanding. To begin with, the philosophers teach that all things seek good through a natural instinct, and this view is received with general consent. But that we may not suppose this doctrine to have anything to do with the uprightness of the human will [*voluntas*], let us observe that the power of free choice [*liberi arbitrii*] is not to be sought in such an

[60] *Inst.* III. 3. 3. [61] *Inst.* III. 3. 5. [62] *Inst.* III. 3. 6. [63] *Inst.* III. 3. 8.

appetite, which arises from inclination of nature rather than from deliberation of mind.[64]

Perhaps it is not too fanciful to think that in Calvin's thought the will (*voluntas*) operates at the second-order. In the language of the Battles translation we are free when our will is renewed by the Spirit to the point where it is effective in producing properly motivated choices or decisions which conform to the commands of God.

On Calvin's (and Augustine's) view of the matter it won't do to say that Christian sanctification is the process initiated by, say, a person's being strengthened by a prayer to God. For the desire to pray, or at least the properly motivated, effective desire to pray, is itself the gift of the Spirit, the first workings of liberation from bondage to sin. To suppose that God acts on a first-order desire, strengthening it only at the behest of human initiative—such as a prayer for God to do so, issuing from an appropriate second-order desire—appears to be semi-Pelagian in character and to violate Calvin's opposition to the claim that we can prepare ourselves for grace that he expresses throughout *Bondage* as well as in the *Institutes*. 'Now it is certain that the human heart always swells with pride and blind self-assurance until it is tamed and subdued by the Spirit of God and settles into humble submission. Nor indeed do we deny that man is prepared in this way to receive the gift of righteousness, but it is by the direction of the Holy Spirit, not by his own strength.'[65] So the way in which the transition from bondage to liberation is brought about is by God directly and efficaciously giving the person in bondage an effective second-order desire that is 'himself' while at the same time empowering him to disown the contrary second-order desires. This does not mean that the disowned second-order desires, and the appropriate first-order desires, are never active, but that they are never henceforth fundamental in the way they were before. When they are active then the conflict between flesh and spirit classically sketched by Paul in Romans 7 is instantiated. There is war between the centrally owned, effective second-order desires to serve the Creator and the still active but no longer fundamental nor fully effective second-order desire to serve the creature.

> The last thing which vexes [Pighius] is my statement that after regeneration the faithful soul is divided into two parts. Every time he mentions this he says that I am imagining or dreaming it. For today the theology of the Romanists is to consider as incredible what ought to be the most familiar knowledge to a Christian. But seeing that such people have no more spiritual experience than do brute beasts, at least the authority of Paul should suffice to put a gag on Pighius. Since it ought not to

[64] *Inst.* II. 2. 26. The Latin originals in brackets have been added to the Battles translation.

[65] *Bondage*, 193.

be in doubt that in the seventh chapter of Romans he portrays a person who is regenerated, let us see whether he does not in that passage present in living form that very thing of which I speak. So then he bemoans the common bondage of the faithful in [speaking of] his own person. For while he wills and desires the good, he does not find the ability to accomplish this. With his mind he agrees with the law of God, but in his flesh with the law of sin, and so he does not do the good which he loves, but rather the evil which he hates. You will see his will agreeing with righteousness. Where then does the obstacle come from, which prevents the action from following? Surely only from a contrary desire. Where, next, does that desire come from, if not from the fact that remnants of the old man which struggle against the Spirit live on in him?[66]

Putting this in slightly different terms, on Calvin's view the person who is freed from bondage to sin does not at once experience a *complete* causal alignment between fundamental, effective second-order desires and the production of first-order desires. The new second-order desire is effective but not completely so, as is shown by the continuing operation of other second-order desires (the 'another law' referred to by Paul in Romans 7: 23) which are not fundamental and so in that sense are not 'me' but for which I am nonetheless responsible. Until there is complete alignment there remains an element of conflict within his person, one that is deeper than the conflict between duty and inclination or that engendered by the strife between competing goals.[67]

Although as far as I am aware Calvin does not discuss the question, there is no reason to think that he would deny that God could immediately remove the evil *habitus* of the soul as well as all its evil effects. He could do so, but he has a good reason not to do so, a reason not unconnected with what is sometimes referred to as 'soul-making'.

Calvin, Freedom, and the Free Will Defence

In this chapter I have tried to take a fresh look at Calvin's views on the bondage of the will to sin. We have seen that he tries, but not with complete success, to separate this issue from the 'other issue' of the particular providence of God over all things. We have also seen that although he makes statements that, on the surface, may seem to imply the opposite, overall the evidence is that Calvin favoured what is today called a compatibilist position on free will, holding that human responsibility is compatible with a form of

[66] *Bondage*, 179.

[67] For an interesting discussion of Thomas Aquinas's approach to Romans 7, see Norman Kretzmann, 'Warring Against the Law of My Mind: Aquinas on Romans 7', in T. V. Morris (ed.), *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

causal determinism. Finally, we have tried to elucidate the modalities of the will's bondage to sin, modalities which have frequently been confused with the metaphysical modalities of the nature of human action.

This allows us readily to see how Calvin would have responded to the modern claim that the existence of evil is consistent with the existence of an all-loving, all-powerful God because it is possible that God has endowed human beings with libertarian free will. This implies that although God could bring it about that human beings exist and never do what is evil he cannot bring it about that human beings exist *such that* they never do evil. Calvin would clearly not be disposed to respond to the problem of evil in these terms, even if he acknowledged the problem as currently discussed. For in his view God could have prevented human beings from doing evil in a way that is consistent with their freedom, for their freedom is a compatibilist freedom. He is quite explicit on this.

> Now we need bear only this in mind: man was far different at the first creation from his whole posterity, who, deriving their origin from him in his corrupted state, have contracted from him a hereditary taint. For, the individual parts of his soul were formed to uprightness, the soundness of his mind stood firm, and his will was free to choose the good. If anyone objects that his will was placed in an insecure position because its power was weak, his status should have availed to remove any excuse; nor was it reasonable for God to be constrained by the necessity of making a man who either could not or would not sin at all. Such a nature would, indeed, have been more excellent. But to quarrel with God on this precise point, as if he ought to have conferred this upon man, is more than iniquitous, inasmuch as it was in his own choice to give whatever he pleased. But the reason he did not sustain man by the virtue of perseverance lies hidden in his plan; sobriety is for us the part of wisdom.[68]

Calvin is not prepared to entertain discussion of what the Lord ought to have done, but he is clear on what he could have done. The Lord in fact left the original pair to the liberty of their own will, and they defected. Why did he do so? It is here that Calvin would appeal once more to the 'epistemic gap' between our understanding and God's.

> But we must so cherish moderation that we do not try to make God render account to us, but so reverence his secret judgments as to consider his will the truly just cause of all things. When dense clouds darken the sky, and a violent tempest arises, because a gloomy mist is cast over our eyes, thunder strikes our ears and all our senses are benumbed with fright, everything seems to us to be confused and mixed up; but all the while a constant quiet and serenity ever remain in heaven. So we must infer that, while the disturbances in the world deprive us of judgment, God out of the pure light of his justice and wisdom tempers and directs these very movements in the best-conceived order to a right end.[69]

[68] *Inst.* 1. 15. 8. [69] *Inst.* 1. 17. 1.

Calvin's recognition of an epistemic gap between what human beings can possibly know and what God knows has cropped up more than once. This epistemic caution is one factor in accounting for the modesty of Calvin's metaphysical reflections on the relation between the nature and activity of God and our own activity. So it is appropriate that we next give consideration to a central, if not the central, epistemic idea in Calvin's thought.