

Calvinism and the Making of the European Mind

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Hot Protestants: Predestination, the Freedom of Will and the Making of the Modern European Mind

Martin van Gelderen

Dordrecht, Monday 14 January 1619

“You are cast away, go! You have started with lies, you have ended with lies. Dimittimini, exite.” The end was bitter and dramatic. The chairman of the Synod of Dort, Johannes Bogerman, lost his patience. Roaring, as some reports put it, he ordered Simon Episcopius, who had just, in equally outspoken terms, accused Bogerman of committing acts of slavery, to leave. Episcopius and his fellow Arminians left.

As usual the two great—indeed massive—seventeenth century accounts of the Synod, those of Johannes Uytenbogaert on the Arminian and of Jacobus Trigland on the orthodox Calvinist side, differ strongly in their account and appreciation of what happened at the Synod of Dort.¹ But they agreed Dort marked a schism; Dutch Reformed Protestantism had split apart. In almost all 57 fateful sessions of the synod which had started on 13 November 1618 the debate had been bitter, though invariably participants asked for moderation, temperance and sobriety. The Synod vacillated between the bitterness of intense theological dispute and a longing for religious peace, between the relentless quest for truth and the thirst for toleration. For over ten years Dutch Reformed Protestants had been arguing, with increasing intensity and rancour. Divisions and issues were manifold, with those such as Simon Episcopius and Johannes Uytenbogaert, labelled Remonstrants or Arminians, endorsing the

1 See Johannes Uytenbogaert, *Kerckelicke Historie* (Rotterdam: s.n., 1647), 1135–1136 and Jacobus Trigland, *Kerckelycke Geschiedenissen, begrypende de swaere en Bekommerlijcke Geschillen, in de Vereenigde Nederlanden voorgevallen met derselver Beslissinge* (Leiden: A. Wyngaerden, 1650), 1137. The official acts of the Synod give a sober version; see *Acta of Handelingen der Nationale Synode...te Dordrecht in de jaren 1618 en 1619* (Houten: Den Hertog, 1987; reprint of the 1885 Leiden edition), 200–204. The most influential early twentieth century Calvinist account opts for full drama; see H. Kaajan, *De Groote Synode van Dordrecht in 1618–1619* (Amsterdam: De Standaard, 1918), 168–172. Recent and more balanced Dutch overviews of the synod include W. Verboom, *De Belijdenis van een gebroken kerk* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2005) and W. van't Spijker et al., *De Dordtse synode van 1618–1619* (Houten: Den Hertog, 1994).

views of the theologian Jacobus Arminius, fighting the Contra-Remonstrants or Gomarists, the followers of his erstwhile Leiden colleague, Franciscus Gomarus. In all probability quite a few Dutch Protestants were somewhere in between, often lost in disbelief and anxiety.

Soon after his appointment to a chair in theology at the University of Leiden in 1602, Arminius had started to raise profound questions concerning the proper understanding of the doctrine of freedom and predestination within Calvinist theology.² It was hardly a local dispute. From the very beginning the 'Arminian troubles' had a strong European dimension. One of Arminius's earliest works, written as early as 1602 and published in 1612, was the *Modest Examination of Dr Perkins's Pamphlet*, a response to William Perkins's study *De Praedestinatonis modo et ordine*.³ The Synod of Dort was the culmination of the 'Europeanisation' of the debates on human free will and divine predestination in the evangelical churches. As the official engraving of the Synod shows, indeed emphasises, delegations from England, the Kurpfalz, Hessen, Nassau, Bremen, Geneva and the Calvinist Swiss Cantons participated in the Synod. In other words, the Synod of Dort was of key importance to the development of modern European Calvinism.

This chapter aims to contribute to the study of the relationship between Calvinism and modernity from a particular angle. Whilst modernity is a contested concept, with even those in favour of theories of modernization speaking in terms of multiple modernities,⁴ there can be little doubt that freedom has become a crucial value in Western democracies, and has been so for quite a while. This chapter explores the significance of the debate on human

2 For a biography of Arminius see Carl Bangs, *Arminius. A Study in the Dutch Reformation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1985). Important recent studies of Arminius's theology include Richard A. Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius. Sources and Directions of Scholastic Protestantism in the Era of Early Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991); Eef Dekker, *Rijker dan Midas. Vrijheid, genade en predestinatie in de theologie van Jacobus Arminius (1559–1609)* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1993); for a succinct study of Arminius' thinking on free will and predestination see Eef Dekker, "Theologische en filosofische vrijheid in de vroege zeventiende eeuw," in Eco Haitsma Mulier, Wyger Velema (eds.), *Vrijheid. Een geschiedenis van de vijftiende tot de twintigste eeuw* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 1999), 53–69.

3 For the English translation see Jacobus Arminius, "Modest Examination of Dr. Perkins's pamphlet," in Jacobus Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius. The London Edition*, vol. 3, (London: 1875; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1986), 249–484.

4 See, amongst others, Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (ed.), *Multiple Modernities* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2002); Peter Wagner, *Modernity as Experience and Interpretation: A New Sociology of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008); Peter Wagner, *Modernity: Understanding the Present* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012).

freedom during the Arminian troubles and its position in what might be called the genealogy of freedom.⁵ The focus is on debates on freedom of conscience, freedom of the will, and the freedom of religion. These debates were deeply intertwined with discussions of the relationship between ecclesiastical and civil authority, between church and state, often seen as another key element in what are interpreted as processes of modernization.⁶

Predestination and Scholasticism

The *Examen Perkinsiani* is not only one of Arminius's earliest but also one of his richest texts, discussing key theological questions concerning supralapsarianism, election, providence, predestination and free will. Perkins was a keen defender of the doctrine of double predestination;⁷ Gomarus was one of its most radical representatives in the Dutch Republic. The main idea was that God had divided mankind unconditionally and, from a logical point of view, even before the Fall, into the elect and the reprobate. As Gomarus saw it, man had not changed due to the Fall. Hence, as he put it as early as 1602, "insofar he was before the Fall indisputably a mind-gifted animal (*animal rationale*), so also after the Fall."⁸ With the Fall man had lost his 'original righteousness and

5 For two, quite different, anthologies see, coming from Protestant perspectives, Willem J. van Asselt, J. Martin Bac, and Roelf T. te Velde, *Reformed Thought on Freedom: The Concept of Free Choice in Early Modern Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010); and gathering modern liberal and republican perspectives, Ian Carter, Matthew H. Kramer, Hillel Steiner (eds.), *Freedom: A Philosophical Anthology* (Oxford/Malden: Blackwell, 2007).

6 This chapter builds on a number of my earlier studies, including most recently, Martin van Gelderen, "Freedom Fighters: The Act of Abjuration, Hugo Grotius and Dutch Debates on Liberty," in Paul Brood and Raymond Kubben (eds.), *The Act of Abjuration: Inspired and Inspirational* (Nijmegen: Wolf Legal Publishers, 2011), 155–172 and "Arminian Trouble: Calvinist Debates on Freedom," in Quentin Skinner and Martin van Gelderen (eds.), *Freedom and the Construction of Europe. Volume I: Religious and Constitutional Liberties*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 21–37.

7 See Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1986, repr. 2008), especially pp. 129–173; Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: the rise of English Arminianism c. 1590–1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) and Peter White, *Predestination, Policy and Polemic. Conflict and Consensus in the English Church from the Reformation to the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

8 Franciscus Gomarus, "Theological Disputation on Free Choice [1602]," in Willem J. van Asselt, J. Martin Bac and Roelf T. te Velde (eds.), *Reformed Thought on Freedom: The Concept of Free Choice in Early Modern Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 131.

holiness' and had fallen into the bondage of sin. Gomarus opened his main declaration on his differences with Arminius with the statement that "all men are, outside of Christ, sinners and violators of God's Law; they therefore stand accused and are doomed as being unworthy of life and worthy of death."⁹ The salvation of the elect was therefore fully and solely God's work; election was the free and unconditional gift of divine mercy and grace. Gomarus put full emphasis on "God's decision to save, at his pleasure, certain specific persons" and "on the ordination to give Christ and faith for this purpose." That decision, Gomarus believed, offered immense comfort and security, reassuring the faithful that their sins had been forgiven. All this was, as he called it, "predestination to salvation."¹⁰

As Gomarus saw it, he was teaching a doctrine of liberation. He frequently argued that "God's grace has the power to eliminate and prevent the slavery of sin."¹¹ It was the corollary of this doctrine that deeply worried Arminius and his followers: the "predestination to salvation" of those who God had elected was paralleled in the writings of Gomarus by the "predestination to damnation or rejection." Asking "whether God in eternity, at his pleasure, has predestined some specific persons, in allowing their sins and in leaving them in sin and faithlessness, to be doomed with justice," Gomarus's answer was a resounding "yes."¹²

In the Arminian view, the doctrine of double predestination turned God into the author of sin, since he predestined the reprobate to be doomed, "ordaining they would sin," as Arminius put it in his famous *Declaration to the States of Holland* in October 1608.¹³ The search for an alternative view of the relationship between God's grace and the human will started with the argument that through Christ God offered his grace and mercy to all mankind. The question was then, as Arminius phrased it, "whether God's grace is an irresistible power." He insisted that in raising this question God's power was not diminished or called in doubt. What was at stake was "merely the way it works, whether it is irresistible or not." The way Arminius saw it, not all human beings decided to accept the gift of divine mercy. As God stretched out his hand, some refused to grasp it and they did so of their own accord. As Arminius put it in a controversial phrase: "many resist the holy Spirit and repudiate the

9 Franciscus Gomarus, "Verclaringhe" in Franciscus Gomarus, *Waerschouwinghe over de Vermaninghe aen R. Donteclock* (Leiden: Jan Jansz. Orlers, 1609), 1.

10 "Verclaringhe," in Gomarus, *Waerschouwinghe*, 13.

11 "Verclaringhe," 21.

12 "Verclaringhe," 15.

13 Jacobus Arminius, *Verklaring van Jacobus Arminius afgelegd in de vergadering van de Staten van Holland op 30 Oktober 1608*, G.J. Hoenderdaal, (ed.), (Lochem: de Tijdstroom, 1960), 70.

offer of God's grace."¹⁴ As Arminius argued, it was an act of free human choice and will to resist, indeed to decline the gift of God's grace, to embrace a life of sin and opt for damnation. Not God but the free will of human sinners was the author of sin. In developing and highlighting this argument Arminius shifted the focus of the debate on predestination to issues concerning human freedom, in particular to questions about the freedom of the will.

Calvinists were not the only ones to do so. Erasmus had already chosen to take the issue of the bondage or freedom of the human will as the key point of his differences and disagreement with Luther. For both Arminius and Gomarus more contemporary Catholic debates were of even greater direct relevance. Arminius was deeply inspired by the writings of Luis de Molina, taking up, reformulating and transforming points and arguments the Spanish Jesuit had put forward in the Catholic debates on the freedom of the human will. The studies of Francisco Suarez were at least as important to Calvinist debates, not only for Arminius but also for Gomarus, who owned a copy of the *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, published by Suarez in 1597 and which became an almost immediate bestseller across Europe, also amongst Protestant theologians.

Suarez und Molina, both Jesuits, were leading representatives of Iberian Neo-Scholasticism. The debates within this intellectual and religious tradition not only provided Europe's Calvinists with arguments in their own pleas for or against predestination, but were also of key importance in terms of rhetoric and logic. After the rise and enthusiasm of the first generation of great Reformers, of Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, it became imperative for Protestants across Europe to clarify and codify what Lutheranism and Reformed Protestantism were all about—both in terms of doctrine and teaching and in terms of becoming a practical, visible church in the world of early modern Europe. In terms of rhetoric, logic and pedagogy, Protestants turned to the rich legacy and variety of European scholasticism, seen here not so much as a distinct intellectual tradition, embodying its own doctrines and values, but as a “technical and logical approach to theology as a discipline.”¹⁵ Most notably in terms of argument, they picked up the academic forms of the *disputatio* and the *quaestio* with its rigorous disposition of *status quaestionis*, the objections

14 Jacobus Arminius, *Verklaring van Jacobus Arminius*, 114.

15 Willem J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker (eds.), *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 37. See also Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin. Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2003); Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 4 vols., (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003); Willem J. Van Asselt, “Scholasticism Revisited: Methodological Reflections on the Study of Seventeenth-century Reformed Thought,” in Alister Chapman,

and finally the *responsio*, containing the final position of the author and a systematic refutation of the objections against his position. The Iberian scholastics, from Vitoria to Suarez, excelled in these genres, as they did in the use of the syllogism as a key way of arguing, of refuting and defending arguments. For Vitoria and Suarez ‘scholasticism’ entailed the eternal engagement with the works of Aristotle, seen as the Philosopher, merged with the writings of Thomas Aquinas in particular. Protestant theologians were also fond of invoking Aristotle and they were keen readers of Aquinas, yet most recent research prefers to argue that as used by Protestants, “scholasticism is a scientific method of research and teaching, and does as such not have a doctrinal content.”¹⁶

Freedom of Conscience

Within the Low Countries embracing scholasticism, even if only in terms of the *methodus* and *ordo* of theology as an academic discipline, meant rejecting other popular approaches to rhetoric, most notably perhaps those associated with the legacy of Erasmus. Moreover the engagement with the works of Iberian scholasticism entailed a deep and, one might say, ‘cruel’ irony. After all, since the beginnings of the so called Dutch Revolt in the 1560s, there was war between the government of Philip II and his allies and the Dutch rebels. For decades Dutch and Spanish families were haunted by the cruelties of war, by death and destruction, by the plundering of cities and by thousands of helpless refugees. Hence for Arminius and Gomarus to be informed by Iberian Neo-scholasticism was one thing; to debate issues of freedom in the political and intellectual context of the young Dutch Republic was quite another.

The debates of the Dutch Revolt swarmed with notions of freedom. As far as religion was concerned, the lively and ongoing debate on freedom of conscience is of particular relevance. In the 1590s the victorious States of Holland commissioned the artist Joachim Wttewael to design a stained-glass window for the St. Jan church in Gouda—where it joined a rich collection of windows, some of them commissioned by Charles V and Philip II. The theme of Holland’s gift and the title of the window was *Freedom of Conscience* (Figure 1).

John Coffey, and Brad S. Gregory (eds.), *Seeing Things Their Way: Intellectual History and the Return of Religion* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2009), 154–174 and Willem J. van Asselt, Maarten Wisse, T. Theo J. Pleizier and Pieter L. Rouwendal, *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011).

16 Willem J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker (eds.), *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 39.

The window is a triumphant celebration of the Dutch Revolt, unequivocally presented as the victory of freedom over tyranny. Against a classical Roman background we see ‘freedom of conscience’ seated on a victorious chariot in front of a triumphal arch. She looks upwards to heaven, presenting herself in full naked truth to God. She holds the Bible and is captivated by the Word of God. She is the very heart of human nature, clutching a golden heart to her bosom.¹⁷



FIGURE 1 *Freedom of Conscience*

17 This paragraph is based on Martin van Gelderen, *De Vrijheid van Consciëntie: het Vrijheidsideaal van de Nederlandse Opstand, 1555–1610*, (Gouda: Stichting Fonds Goudse Glazen, 1996).

In many ways this is an irenic representation of freedom of conscience, highlighting elements that were recognised as fundamental by virtually all Dutch Protestants. Next to 'Freedom of Conscience' we see the 'Protector of Faith', another female figure, but now in full armour, wielding her sword and holding the lion's shield. She is conquering, indeed demolishing, tyranny, a male figure, a king, lying beaten on the ground, with broken weapons. On the right side we can see that the freedom of conscience can be victorious, because her chariot is pulled by the virtues, by constancy, faithfulness, prudence and justice.

Around 1595 this was probably how many Dutch saw their revolt and how they celebrated freedom of conscience. This is not to say that they agreed on what freedom of conscience should entail, either in theology or in the political and religious praxis of their days. The grave of Dirck Volckertsz. Coornhert (1522–1590) is located close to the St. Jans church window celebrating *Freedom of Conscience*. The vicinity is deeply symbolic. Coornhert was one of the most prolific and provocative spokesmen for religious toleration during the Revolt, arguing that freedom of conscience entailed freedom of expression, freedom of printing and freedom of public worship.¹⁸

In one of his very last works, *Of Predestination*, Coornhert was one of the first in Holland to explore the relationship between conscience and will. As Coornhert saw it, freedom of conscience presupposed the freedom of the human will.¹⁹ Freedom of conscience, he claimed, was built on the freedom of judgement, the freedom to choose, to will and to act accordingly. Hence doctrines favouring notions of predestination were hard to square with the recognition of the freedom of conscience, as enshrined in the 1579 Union of Utrecht, the foundational law, if there ever was one, of the Dutch Republic. As Coornhert saw it at the end of his life, freedom of conscience and doctrines of predestination were incompatible.

18 For Coornhert on toleration see M. van Gelderen, *The Political Thought of the Dutch Revolt 1555–1590* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 243–256. New important studies include: Mirjam van Veen, *Verschooninghe van de roomsche afgoderye. Calvijns polemiek met nicodemieten, in het bijzonder met Coornhert*, (t Goy-Houten, 2001) M. Roobol, *Landszaken. De godsdienstgesprekken tussen gereformeerde predikanten en D.V. Coornhert onder leiding van de Staten van Holland (1577–1583)* (Phd Diss., University of Amsterdam, 2005); *D.V. Coornhert (1522–1590): polemist en vredezoeker*, Jaap Gruppelaar and Gerlof Verwey (eds.) (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010).

19 See E. Dekker, "Wilsvrijheid volgens Coornhert in het traditie-historische licht van de scholastiek. Een kleine dieptepeiling," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 45 (1991), 107–119.

Freedom of Will

As debates deepened, a clarification of the concept of freedom was badly needed. The first to do so was Hugo Grotius (1583–1645). After his studies in Leiden in the 1590s, where he was part of the select group of young scholars around Europe's leading humanist Joseph Justus Scaliger, Grotius quickly became the main political and intellectual confidante of the political leader of the young Dutch Republic, Johan van Oldenbarnevelt. On the most important political issues it was Grotius who framed the language of seventeenth-century Dutch debates on law, politics and religion. In 1603, barely twenty years old, Grotius was asked to write a legitimation of the actions of Jacob van Heemskerck, who, sailing the 'East Indian' seas at the behest of the new East India Company (VOC), had seized a Portuguese vessel and taken prize and booty to the value of more than three million guilders; to those who brought the issue to court, it looked like an act of piracy.

Grotius interpreted Van Heemskerck's actions within the legal and moral context of the war with Spain. In a lengthy historical chapter Grotius set his essay, now known as *De Iure Praedae*, staunchly within the conventional narrative of the Dutch Revolt. In this spirit he hailed the 1581 Act of Abjuration as a defence of Dutch 'downtrodden liberty',²⁰ a major moment in the defensive war that, in 1603, was still ongoing. Indeed, since the Abjuration, with Philip II seeking to recover by means of war the authority he had lost, the Dutch had been fighting on the basis of "the strongest just cause of war, the defence of their lives, their goods and their rightful freedom."²¹ In other words, Grotius offered what was principally a reflection on the lawfulness of the ongoing war with Spain and Portugal.

As Grotius recognised boldly, problems of war and peace cannot be analysed and resolved "solely on the basis of written laws"—1603 was fundamentally different from 1581. To settle questions of war and peace a turn to the *ratio naturae*, to natural reason, was required. Grotius urges his readers to turn to the "jurists of antiquity," especially to Cicero, who "refer the art of civil

20 Hugo Grotius, *De Iure Praedae Commentarius*, H.G. Hamaker (ed.) (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1868), 165, from now on abbreviated as DIP. I will also give references to the recent reprint of the English translation *De Iure Praedae Commentarius. Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty*, Volume 1, Gwladys L. Williams, Walther H. Zeyde (eds.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950), reprinted and published by the Liberty Fund in 2006. See Hugo Grotius, *Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty*, Martine van Ittersum (ed.), (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2006), 246. Abbreviated as *Commentary*.

21 Grotius, DIP, 274; *Commentary*, 400.

government back to the very fount of nature.”²² This appeal to natural reason impelled Grotius to explore the “natural properties” which every single part of the creation has received from God. As Grotius sees it, “true and divinely inspired self-love” is the basic “principle of the whole natural order,” “for all things in nature, as Cicero repeatedly insists, are tenderly regardful of self, and seek their own happiness and security.”²³ In paragraphs that are now seen as the beginning of modern natural law theory²⁴ Grotius presents the primacy of life and therefore of self-preservation as the main characteristic of human beings in the state of natural liberty.

In a seminal move Grotius goes on to argue that “God made man *autechousios*,” *liberum suique juris*, perhaps best translated as “fully autonomous, free and in his own right.”²⁵ It is a quintessential Grotian sentence, presented as a profoundly Christian principle, steeped in Greek philosophy, and built on one of Roman Law’s most classic phrases. In Grotius’s lines, the notions of being ‘fully autonomous’, ‘free’ and ‘in one’s own right’ go smoothly hand in hand, though analytically they were quite distinct. As Michael Frede has noted, the Greek term ‘autexousion’ “seems to be of Stoic origin and refers to [the] ability to act of one’s own initiative”²⁶ Grotius may have found the term in Epictetus, or in Origen, who as part of his major work *De Principiis*, had written a brief piece on freedom (*Peri autexousiou*) and who had been crucial to Erasmus. Origen’s reflections on freedom could be read, and this was probably also Grotius’s reading, as emphasizing and squaring notions of autonomy, responsibility and self-determination.

On this reading it was possible to link the Greek term ‘autechousios’ with the Roman Law definition of ‘libertas’; both could be seen as carrying the connotation that being ‘naturally free’ means to be independent, master of one’s own actions. In the classical texts of Roman Law, Justinian’s Institutes and the Digest, *libertas* is defined as the natural faculty to act as one pleases.²⁷ Grotius

22 Grotius, *DIP*, 6; *Commentary*, 17.

23 Grotius, *DIP*, 9; *Commentary*, 21.

24 See amongst others the seminal studies of Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government, 1572–1651* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Knud Haakonssen, *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy: from Grotius to the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Jerome B. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

25 Grotius, *DIP*, 18; *Commentary*, p. 33.

26 Michael Frede, *A Free Will. Origins of the Notion in Ancient Thought*, edited by A.A. Long (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 74.

27 See *Justinian’s Institutes*, Peter Birks and Grant McLeod (eds.) (London: Duckworth, 1987) I, 3: “Et libertas quidem est, ex quam etiam liberi vocantur, naturalis facultas eius quod cuique facere libet, nisi si quid aut vi aut iure prohibetur.”

takes up this definition and argues that the familiar concept of ‘natural liberty’ refers to ‘the faculty to act’. To be free, he argues, means that in our actions and in our use of the things that belong to us we are not subject to any other human will. Thus, right from the start, Grotius explicitly associates the concept of freedom, of *libertas*, with notions of ownership and property, or, in his in own Latin language, with the rich and complicated concept of *dominium*.

Whilst the division of human beings into free men and slaves (“omnes homines aut liberi sunt aut servi”) is the first and fundamental distinction in the Roman Law of Persons (*ius personarum*), taking up the concept of *sui iuris* referred to another key juxtaposition governing the Roman Law conception of the person, namely the opposition between those who, in the legal sense, are and act on their own right, and those who are *alieni iuris*, living under the control and jurisdiction of another person. To be *aliena iuris* meant to be *in potestate*, to be within the power of someone else. By contrast, as Grotius still insisted in *De Iure Belli ac Pacis*, to be *sui iuris* and to be free meant to have power over oneself, to have *potestas in se*.²⁸

Whilst many commentators struggled to square the notion of humans as naturally free with the legal institution of servitude, Grotius highlighted the divine act to create man both free and *sui iuris*. In doing so Grotius elevated the notion of being free to the defining characteristic of man as God’s creation. This move strengthened his analysis of man’s natural state as one of independence, of acting according to one’s own will and having power over oneself. In this way the concepts of freedom and of being *sui iuris* were set up as cornerstones of Grotian thought—and Grotius claimed he had done so in a way that carried the ‘consent’ of all mankind.

As so often Grotius overrated his powers of persuasion. From a theological point of view the idea of man as *autechousios*, as fully autonomous, was highly problematic. Arminius rejected the idea in the theses he wrote for a public disputation on the free will as part of the 1604–1607 disputation cycle at the University of Leiden. Arminius insisted that the idea of freedom as “perfect independence, or complete freedom of action...appertains to God alone.”²⁹ After all, as Arminius pointed out, the idea that humans are “creatures who are subjected to the command and the providence of God” was one of the foundations of Christianity. Starting the analysis of human freedom with the contention that God had created man “free and on his own right,” Grotius

²⁸ Grotius, *DIP*, Book 1, Chapter 1, § V.

²⁹ Jacobus Arminius, “De Liberis hominis arbitrio,” in: *Opera Theologica* (Leiden: Godefridus Basson, 1629), 262. The English translation is James Arminius, “On the free will of man and its powers,” in: *Works*, vol. 2, 190.

simply failed to explain how human freedom squared with divine providence. For all involved in the Arminian debate, however, this was the key issue. For Arminius the very notion of will entailed a certain freedom. As he put it, “there cannot be any will if it be not free.” But the freedom of the will was not *autechousios*. It was ‘freedom from necessity’, ‘whether this proceeds from an external cause compelling, or from a nature inwardly determining absolutely to one thing.’³⁰ Arminius presents this view as a matter of almost common sense. It is of vital importance to his view of the relationship between God’s grace and the human will, in particular to the argument that in his will man can resist what Arminius describes as the effective working of God’s grace. He fully recognises that there are very fine lines of distinction at stake, and insists that he does not want “to ascribe too much to the human will.”³¹ Hence, in powerful terms, Arminius goes on to explain that in ‘spiritual’ matters, after the fall, the free will of man towards the true good is not only “wounded, maimed” and “weakened,” but “imprisoned, destroyed, and lost.”³² After the fall there is “darkness of mind,” “perverseness of the heart” and “impotence of all human powers” to reach out to what is truly good in spiritual matters.

This might be different, Arminius pondered, with regards to ‘natural’ and ‘animal’ matters, and at least on this point there seemed to be some agreement. In the disputation on *de libero arbitrio* from March 1603 Gomarus made a careful distinction between three ‘spheres’ of human activity, namely the natural, covering “what pertains to animal life”—‘sleeping’ is one of the examples given—the ‘moral’, covering “external obedience and the preservation of mankind” and finally the spiritual, “what looks at man’s spiritual life and his true happiness.”³³ The Fall had affected these spheres of human action in different ways. As Gomarus had put it in an earlier disputation in June 1602, “in external affairs of both a practical and a theoretical nature” man’s faculties seemed to be able to do something good. In the Calvinist ‘synopsis’ of ‘pure theology’, written after the Synod of Dort, the author of the chapter ‘On the free will’, Antonius Thysius, took up the point, arguing with words derived from Calvin that in “matters that concern natural and civil life,” some rare “sparks” of free will may

30 James Arminius, “On the free will of man and its powers,” in: *Works*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1986), 190.

31 See in particular Jacobus Arminius, *Verklaring van Jacobus Arminius afgelegd in de vergadering van de Staten van Holland op 30 Oktober 1608*, G.J. Hoenderdaal, (ed.), (Lochem: de Tijdstroom, 1960), 114.

32 James Arminius, “On the free will of man and its powers,” in: *Works*, vol. 2, 192.

33 Willem J. van Asselt, J. Martin Bac, and Roelf T. te Velde, *Reformed Thought on Freedom: The Concept of Free Choice in Early Modern Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 141.

have remained after the fall.³⁴ Thysius also agreed with Arminius on *autechousios*, stating emphatically that any faculty of ‘self-determination’ and ‘independence’ in terms of ‘law, authority and command’ belonged to God alone. For the Calvinists the idea of freedom of the human will from necessity was the most troubling one. They needed to rebut the argument that Dort’s doctrine of predestination meant that God was the cause, the author of sin. Gomarus emphasised that after the Fall, man was still a ‘mind-endowed’ creature, which implied having the faculty of free choice. As Gomarus saw it, this faculty is free in two ways, “not only in the sense that it is not coerced, but also in the sense that it is not necessitated.”³⁵ To be sure, with the Fall man had lost his “original righteousness and holiness” and had fallen into the bondage of sin—but it had been a “free” fall. It was a delicate argument. In the words of Gomarus, even though fallen men “are not able to do anything but sin, they do it freely, for they elicit the exercise of an act in such a way that they are able not to elicit it, and they are masters of their own acts.”³⁶ For the orthodox Calvinists following Gomarus, the argument remained crucial. In 1625 Thysius still appealed to the variety of notions of necessity along similar lines. In his key distinction necessity can refer to external ‘force’, leaving no room for any free will, and to a kind of ‘unchangeability’ that does. God is eternal and unchangeable. In the ‘state of innocence’, man’s free decision to opt for sin coincides with the decrees of predestination and in this sense God is not the author of sin. These were fine distinctions. In the end Arminians and Gomarists were left hanging in a precarious and ironic balance, with Arminius keen to tone down his views on the freedom of will of man, and with Gomarus, Thysius and other Calvinists playing up human freedom—at least until the Fall, when men freely fell into the bondage of sin.

Freedom of Religion

The attempt to create consent also marked Grotius’s reflection on the freedom of religion and the position of the church in the commonwealth. Throughout his life Grotius favoured what he regarded as the veritable Erasmian church, based on concord, ‘peace and unanimity’. Irenicism requires, as Grotius argues

34 Thysius, “On the free will,” in *Synopsis purioris theologiae* (Leiden, 1625), Chapter 17, par. 20, 146 (the first English translation of this *Synopsis* is in preparation and will be published by Brill, Leiden).

35 Gomarus, “Theological Disputation on Free Choice,” 129.

36 Gomarus, “Theological Disputation on Free Choice,” 132.

with direct quotes from Erasmus, “that each party adapts itself somewhat to the other.” Concord calls for unanimous agreement on the “absolute minimum,” the few fundamentals of Christianity, “leaving to each his own free judgement on many questions, because many things are very obscure.”³⁷ Hence, in theology, as in civil philosophy, Grotius seeks to solve conflicts by a quest for the universally shared theological and philosophical foundations for peace and concord. These shared fundamentals have to be derived by way of rational argument, thus guaranteeing their universal acceptance. Grotius developed this approach in *Meletius*, a manuscript written in 1611; it was his first attempt to, defend religious toleration on the basis of a number of *decreta* and *praecepta* which all faithful must accept.³⁸ In the course of the years Grotius deepened his plea for toleration. One of his highlights—or acts of desperation, depending on one’s views—was the ‘oration’ in the Amsterdam town council of 23 April 1616, where Grotius presented his plea for an Erasmian church explicitly as a programme for ‘toleration’. Grotius called upon the warring parties “to maintain the unity of the church through mutual toleration, in spite of the theological conflicts that have risen over the issue of predestination.” Tolerating “the diversity of sentiment” was wise and prudent in conflicts over matters, such as predestination, that “were not absolutely vital for salvation.”³⁹

In another key work, *De Imperio summarum potestatum circa sacra*, published only after Grotius’ death, but circulating widely in manuscript in both Holland and England, where John Selden owned one of the copies, Grotius offers a strong defence of freedom of conscience. Putting it in the context of the wider debate on the relationship between freedom and slavery, he insists that, whilst, as he puts it, “external actions form the primary material of human authority,” internal actions such as thoughts and beliefs are by their very nature free. “The better part of man” is by nature free from slavery. As Grotius puts it, underpinning his view as so often with a quotation from Seneca, “only the body is at the mercy and disposition of a master.” The mind is its own

37 Hugo Grotius, *Ordinum Hollandiae ac Westfrisiae Pietas* (1613), Edwin Rabbie (ed.), (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 168–169. The quotes were taken from Erasmus, *De amabili ecclesiae Concordia*.

38 See Hugo Grotius, *Meletius de iis quae inter Christianos conveniunt epistola*, G.H.M. Posthumus Meyjes (ed.), (Leiden: Brill, 1988), III, 19, p. 80 and 109. For Grotius’ theology see Henk Nellen and Edwin Rabbie (eds.), *Hugo Grotius Theologian. Essays in Honour of G.H.M. Posthumus Meyjes* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

39 Hugo Grotius, *Oratie vanden hooch-geleerden voortreffeycken Meester Hugo de Groot... ghedaen inde vergaderinghe der 36. Raden der Stadt Amsterdam* (Enkhuizen: s.n., 1622), 7–9.

master, “*sui iuris est.*” Hence, as Grotius reformulated Article 13 of the Union of Utrecht, “no-one is to be punished for thinking.”

Matters changed when thoughts and beliefs were turned into external actions, when they acquired a public dimension. In October 1613 Grotius published the *Ordinum Hollandiae ac Westfrisiae Pietas*, the most comprehensive justification of the policy of Oldenbarnevelt, Grotius and their allies in the States of Holland to appear during the Arminian troubles.⁴⁰ The Dutch translation followed immediately, the French translation appeared a little later. The multi-lingual publishing campaign of *Ordinum Pietas* indicated its importance; it tried to reach and sway an international audience, perhaps King James I above all. As Grotius put it, the problem with the Counter-Remonstrants was that they were neither willing to be charitable in church disputes nor prepared to accept the authority of the supreme magistrate to arbitrate and settle such disputes. In this sense Counter-Remonstrants were Puritans, who, Grotius writes, “deny that the King is the head of the external Anglican Church.”⁴¹

These remarks exemplify Grotius’ strategy to defame the Counter-Remonstrants and to sway the opinion of James I. They also pointed to the heart of the conflict. *Au fond* Counter-Remonstrants disagreed profoundly with Grotius’ theory of commonwealth and church, with his views on sovereignty and his plea for toleration. Grotius had developed his theory of the formation of the commonwealth and of the location of sovereignty in *De Iure Praedae*.⁴² As Grotius explained, for reasons of demographic growth, better protection and greater economic convenience individuals in the state of natural liberty create smaller societies, which are “formed by general consent for the sake of the common good.”⁴³ The *respublica* refers to a multitude of private persons who have come together to improve their protection through mutual aid and to assist each other in acquiring the necessities of life. Of their own free will these individuals unite by way of a civil contract—Grotius uses the term *foedus*—in a “unified and permanent body” with its own set of laws. From *singuli* they turn themselves into *cives*, citizens.

40 I have used the fine new edition and translation prepared by Edwin Rabbie: Hugo Grotius, *Ordinum Hollandiae ac Westfrisiae Pietas* (1613), Edwin Rabbie (ed.), (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

41 Hugo Grotius, *Ordinum Hollandiae ac Westfrisiae Pietas* (1613), Edwin Rabbie (ed.) (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 172–173.

42 For what follows see Martin van Gelderen, “Aristotelians, Monarchomachs and Republicans: Sovereignty and *Respublica Mixta* in Dutch and German Political Thought, 1580–1650,” in Martin van Gelderen, Quentin Skinner (eds.), *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage. Vol. 1: Republicanism and Constitutionalism in early modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 195–218.

43 Grotius, *DIP*, 19/20; *Commentary*, 20.

The laws of the commonwealth emanate from its will as a unified body based on consent. Grotius argues that “civil power, manifesting itself in laws and judgements, resides primarily and essentially in the bosom of the commonwealth itself.”⁴⁴ Of course not everybody has the time to devote himself to the administration of civil affairs. The exercise of lawful power is therefore entrusted to a number of magistrates, who act for the common good. By mandate the magistrates have the authority to make laws for the *respublica*, which bind all citizens. Grotius uses the concept of *magistratus* to emphasise that those who exercise civil power, be they king, princes, counts, States assemblies or town councils, are administrators. Arguing that “just as every right of the magistrate comes from the commonwealth, so every right of the commonwealth comes from private persons,” Grotius reaffirms later in *De Iure Praedae* that “public power is constituted by collective consent.”⁴⁵

The public church is part of the commonwealth. As a public office the church stands under the authority of the magistrate, who holds and administers civil power on behalf of the citizens that make up the commonwealth. This conception of the position of the public church in the commonwealth implies, to quote Grotius, that “nobody has the right to decide on the faith of the Church inasmuch as it is public, except for him in whose hand and power all public bodies lie.”⁴⁶ Given the public status of the Church, it is part of the commonwealth; hence its oversight lies with the supreme magistrate, whose civil powers are derived from the unified body of citizens that make up the commonwealth.

Both Grotius and Uytenbogaert were keen to underline that the Counter-Remonstrants did not share this line of thought. Uytenbogaert did so in his *Treatise on the Office and Authority of a Higher Christian Government in Church Affairs*,⁴⁷ published in 1610. It included a refined dissection of the Counter-Remonstrant view on the relationship between church and civil government. Counter-Remonstrants saw ecclesiastical and civil authority as wielding distinct powers of different kinds in two diverse spheres of human life. Whilst the authority of the church was in religion and was a spiritual power, the sovereignty of civil government was related to civil affairs.

At the same time, the Counter-Remonstrants insisted that, as Polyander put it in the *Synopsis of Pure Theology*, God is the *causa efficiens principalis*, or, as he

44 Grotius, *DIP*, 25; *Commentary*, 25.

45 Grotius, *DIP*, 91; *Commentary*, 92.

46 Grotius, *Ordinum Pietas*, 188–189.

47 Johannes Uytenbogaert, *Tractaet van t'Ampt ende Authoriteyt eener hooger Christelicker Overheydt in Kerckelicke saecken* (The Hague: Hillebrant Jacobsz., 1610).

translated the phrase, “the principal effective cause or author of each government.”⁴⁸ Above all this meant, as Gomarus argued, that civil authority “too is under God.” Therefore, he added, “the power and authority of civil government is not almighty and unlimited; neither is its pleasure a firm rule, nor is its will its law; both have to be bridled by God’s Will and Word.”⁴⁹ As the Counter-Remonstrants saw it, if and when church and civil government were united under the command of God’s Will, they should not be seen as rivals for sovereignty but as complementary offices, each wielding its distinct powers for the sake of the Word of God. As usual Gomarus spoke with force and clarity: “Justice and the fear of God should set the rule and measure of civil government; God’s honour and the happiness and salvation of its subjects should be its aim.”⁵⁰

Like the Arminians, the Gomarists argued that civil power was “effective only upon the body,” that it could neither touch the human soul, nor man’s free conscience. Faith, as Polyander put it, “is to be persuaded, not forced, and nothing should be as voluntary as Religion and the internal worship of God.”⁵¹ For Counter-Remonstrants the recognition of the distinctive nature of the ‘spiritual sphere’ entailed respect for both the freedom of conscience and the autonomy of the church in spiritual affairs. Religious conflict should be resolved within the church itself—no interference from civil magistrates was allowed. Moreover, given that the church had the sacred duty to spread and profess the Word of God, at the interface of theology and moral philosophy the church should be free to give directions. Gomarus was hardly modest on this point, placing the ‘servants of Christ’ in the line of both the great Old Testament prophets, such as Moses and Nathan, and the New Testament apostles, such as Timothy and of course Peter. Gomarus hammered home the key point. “Allow yourself to be taught, you Kings,” he proclaimed, “allow yourself to be disciplined, you judges on earth.”⁵² Given that the church was autonomous in the interpretation of the Word of God, it was clear that not only in religious but also in moral debates the church was entitled to give direction, indeed instruction. In the Arminian view, having arrived at this point Calvinists started to interfere in civil affairs; in the worst case scenario their idea of what was labeled ‘collaterality’ meant replacing ‘the popery of Rome’ with ‘the popery of Geneva’.

48 Johannes Polyander a Kerckhoven, *Synopsis purioris theologiae* (1642), 296.

49 Gomarus, “Verclaringhe,” 14.

50 Gomarus, “Verclaringhe,” 14.

51 Polyander, *Synopsis purioris theologiae*, 312.

52 Gomarus, “Verclaringhe,” 28.

Hot Protestantism and European Modernities

For Grotius and Oldenbarnevelt the Arminian troubles ended in tragedy. As it turned out they were neither able to enlist the support of King James, who may have seen that Grotian political thought was rather different from his own work, nor to sway Dutch public opinion. When Stadholder Maurice of Nassau declared his support for the Counter-Remonstrant cause, the Arminian battle was decided. The lifestyle of Maurice, whose court exemplified the virtues and vices of the Dutch brothel, may have been a disgrace to the Counter-Remonstrant love of discipline and virtue; nevertheless his popularity helped the Counter-Remonstrants to sway public debate, which was the decisive factor in the battle over Arminianism. When the Synod of Dordrecht elevated the doctrine of double predestination to dogmatic heights, Grotian irenicism and Arminianism suffered their greatest defeat. But the victory of orthodox Calvinism was in many ways a pyrrhic one. Due to the decisive role of the Stadholder, the Calvinist church had to accept the *de facto* superiority of secular authority; on this issue Maurice was in full agreement with his mentor and rival, Oldenbarnevelt. Moreover, for all its dominance, the Calvinist church was not able to impose its doctrine and discipline on the Dutch faithful. The freedom of conscience was untouched and living under Calvinist discipline remained voluntary.

Moreover, as a result of the 'Arminian troubles' the quest for discipline and uniformity suffered badly. Arminians and Calvinists fought their battles in the public domain. The big, and perhaps only winners in the 'Arminian troubles' were Holland's publishing houses, as pamphlet after pamphlet was brought onto the burgeoning market of voracious readers—and listeners.⁵³ Some of these pamphlets, including a number of the so called *Ferry Conversations*, that presented their readers with fictive records of conversations on the ferries that connected the main towns of Holland, are fairly civilised. Henricus Slatius, the Arminian author of *The Predestined Thief*, which offers a conversation between a Calvinist preacher and a thief awaiting the death penalty, still uses highly amusing satire to ridicule predestination. (Figure 2: Arminian Shit-Car). But the highly popular *Arminian Shit-Car* (1618) shows that in the heat of the debate the pen became passionate and discipline was easily lost. 'Hot Protestantism' was

53 For the period between 1610 and 1620 the major collection of pamphlets, the Knuttel collection of the Royal Library, lists 1368 different publications on the Arminian troubles. See Craig Harline, *Pamphlets, Printing, and Political Culture in the Early Dutch Republic* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987).



FIGURE 2 *Arminian Shit-Car*

the result.⁵⁴ Whilst Protestant church consistories sought to promote religious discipline and uniformity and Protestant theologians had recourse to neo-scholasticism in order to refine and systematise their doctrines, as pamphleteers Arminians and Gomarists lost themselves in 'Grub-street', the world of libel,

54 I owe the term to Peter Lake. See Peter Lake with Michael Questier, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002) to which I am much indebted.

insult and slander, of violent rhetoric. The town magistrates in Holland were unable—if in fact they ever made the attempt—to halt the development of a debating culture of pamphleteers and printmakers, whose loyalties wavered between church and commerce, faith and felony. The political culture of pamphlets and prints provided authors, publishers, vendors and readers with novel instruments to fight out their theological and political conflicts in the public domain, with levels of participation that were perhaps unrivalled in Europe—from the church to the ferry. The creation of a sphere for free public debate was arguably the most significant contribution the Arminian troubles made to processes of ‘democratisation’ and ‘modernisation’.

With regards to what is often seen as another hallmark of modernity, the acceptance of religious toleration, Grotian irenicism has undoubtedly fared much better than orthodox Calvinism in recent historiography. Indeed, addressing the controversy on predestination, Grotius explicitly calls for toleration, using the very term. He explicitly dismisses the *ratio*, the way of reasoning that says: “He disagrees with me on predestination, I cannot bear him, he is heterodox, he is a heretic, he is a Pelagian, he is a Socinian.” As Grotius presents his case, for the sake of the supreme ecclesiastical principles of peace, concord and unity, the adversaries of Arminius must accept that he may have a point. Calvinist must drop their insistence on predestination, even if they believe that it plays a key role in matters of salvation. There is no room for argument here, no toleration of the argument that predestination should be a key element of Christianity. Grotius registers all the doubts concerning this issue, setting out the rational arguments on all sides, *in utramque partem*, as sound humanists should do. Given these doubts, given these lines of contestations, the rational conclusion is irenicism, which Calvinists must accept, whether they like it or not.

The alternative of religious pluralism, defined here as a plurality of churches in one commonwealth, is no option for Grotius and the Arminians—not until long after the rupture at the Synod of Dort. For all involved that rupture was deeply puzzling. As long as Arminians remained inside the church, debates were hot and intense. But once they were excommunicated, sent away from the Synod, Arminians could and should not be persecuted in their good, though of course deeply erring conscience. Being sent away, Arminians were at least as puzzled. In a deep twist of historical irony, they moved to set up another church as a voluntary association, very much along standard Calvinist lines. But what kind of church were they building? In 1627, after the death of Maurice, the Remonstrant leader Simon Episcopius published a passionate pamphlet pleading for ‘free religion’. Each person, Episcopius insisted, is entitled “to declare his sentiments in the matter of religion freely and frankly.” Indeed

“each conscientious Christian” has the freedom to “profess and to teach others.”⁵⁵ But Remonstrants did not want to set up another ‘public church’. Episcopius stuck to the idea that there should be only one public church in the commonwealth. As he explained, they merely intended to meet as brothers in faith in “private meetings.” The new ‘church’ was—and still is—called the ‘Remonstrant Brotherhood’.

Epilogue: Freedom's Genealogy

At face value, the analytical political philosophers of our days may not greatly resemble the ‘hot protestants’ of the seventeenth century. Current academic debate in moral and political philosophy is rich, polite and almost scholastic in its love of fine distinction and subtle venom. In terms of rhetorical strategies analytical and scholastic philosophical argument perhaps have one or two things in common, starting with the declarations of love for logic and analytical rigour. Moreover, in both schools of thought, freedom was and is hotly debated. Hence, in assessing the role of ‘hot protestant’ debate in the making of the modern European mind, represented, amongst others, in the current debates of moral and political philosophy, the genealogy of freedom seems worth exploring. In what is advertised as the “most substantial anthology on the philosophy of freedom ever compiled”⁵⁶ Iberian neo-scholastics’ and northern ‘hot protestants’ are simply absent. Obviously, opening three sections of the anthology, including the part on ‘freedom and the mind’, Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) is the early modern hero of modern discussions of freedom. In chapter 21 of *Leviathan* (1651), Hobbes defined freedom with stark simplicity.⁵⁷ He claimed that freedom “signifieth (properly) the absence of Opposition” with ‘opposition’ meaning no more than “externall Impediments of motion.” In terms of genealogy the proposal that freedom is no more than the absence of interference and refers to motion and action alone can be seen as initiating modern liberal thinking on the subject, culminating in the work of philosophers such as Isaiah Berlin. In his most famous essay, *Two Concepts of*

55 Simon Episcopius, *Vrye Godes-dienst, of t'Samen-spreekinghe tusschen Remonstrant en Contra-Remonstrant* (S.l.: s.n., 1627), 15–17.

56 Ian Carter, Matthew H. Kramer, Hillel Steiner (eds.), *Freedom: A Philosophical Anthology* (Oxford/Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007).

57 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Richard Tuck (ed.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), Chapter 21. See Quentin Skinner, *Hobbes and Republican Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 211.

Liberty, Berlin argued that “I can normally be said to be free to the degree to which no man or body of men interferes with my activity.”⁵⁸ According to this conception of what, following Berlin, is usually called ‘negative liberty’, freedom simply means to be free from coercion, free from intervention with the choices one has decided to make, or at the very least, the actions one has decided to take.

The stark simplicity of Thomas Hobbes entailed path-breaking moves. First, in terms of political thought his new definition of freedom challenged long-standing republican notions of freedom, such as those favoured by Grotius, where the emphasis was on powers of self-government, on freedom from domination, not solely from interference.⁵⁹ Second, to argue, as Hobbes already did in *De Cive* in 1637, that “liberty consists in motion” was to discard almost the entire debate on the freedom of the will. The full implications of Hobbes’s position were brought out in the debate about liberty and necessity with John Bramhall, the Anglican bishop of Derry, that started in the summer of 1645.⁶⁰ In substance, vocabulary and grammar the Bishop’s view that “true liberty consists in the elective power of the rational will” was deeply indebted to positions held by Iberian scholastics such as Molina and by the followers of Arminius. Hobbes wanted none of it. When Bramhall appealed to the notion of freedom from necessity, that had featured so strongly in the Arminian debate, Hobbes replied: “I understand never more what he means by liberty; and though he says he means liberty from necessitation, yet I do understand not how such a

58 Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in: *Four Essays in Liberty* (Oxford: University Press, 1969), 122. For Berlin see John Gray, *Isaiah Berlin* (London: Harper Collins, 1995), Michael Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin: A Life* (New York: Vintage, 2000) and Duncan Kelly, “The political thought of Isaiah Berlin,” in: *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* (2002), vol. 4, no. 1, 25–48.

59 For this point see most recently Quentin Skinner, *Hobbes and Republican Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); for Grotius see van Gelderen, “Freedom Fighters: The Act of Abjuration, Hugo Grotius and Dutch Debates on Liberty,” in Paul Brood and Raymond Kubben (eds.), *The Act of Abjuration: Inspired and Inspirational* (Nijmegen: Wolf Legal Publishers, 2011). Key studies of republican notions of freedom include Philip Pettit, *Republicanism. A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford, University Press, 1997); Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) and Cécile Laborde and John Maynor (eds.), *Republicanism and Political Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008).

60 For the key texts see Vere Chappell (ed.), *Hobbes and Bramhall on Liberty and Necessity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). For the background see Nicholas D. Jackson, *Hobbes, Bramhall and the Politics of Liberty and Necessity. A Quarrel of the Civil Wars and Interregnum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

liberty can be, and it is a taking of the question without proof.”⁶¹ When Bramhall employed conventional scholastic notions such as hypothetical necessity, Hobbes answered with irony, if not ridicule, noting “how an easy and plain thing—but withal false—with the grave usage of such terms as hypothetical necessity and necessity upon supposition and such like terms of Schoolmen, may be obscured and made to seem profound learning.”⁶² Hobbes’s attack on “the vanity of distinctions used in the Schools” was a double one. In terms of epistemology Hobbes made the major move of casting scholastic distinctions aside; in elucidating the freedom of will he claimed “there can no other proof be offered but every men’s own experience.”⁶³ In terms of ontology Hobbes rejected the entire tradition that saw the will as one of the faculties of the human soul. In doing so Hobbes laid bare that Scholasticism had always been more than a mere ‘method’, that it entailed a distinct and—at least in the view of Hobbes—debatable epistemology and ontology.

The appeal to experience as the realm of proof for the freedom or bondage of the will proved to be an enduring one and, James Harris argues, came to dominate eighteenth-century debates on liberty and necessity,⁶⁴ at least in the British Isles. Much of that debate bristled with appeals to and protests against John Locke’s analysis of the human will in the *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, of which the first edition appeared in 1689. In the same year Locke published *Letter on Toleration/Epistola de Tolerantia*, which he dedicated to Philippus van Limborch (1633–1712), the leading theologian of the Dutch Remonstrants. Locke and Limborch had first met in 1684, soon after Locke had moved to Holland. In the years to come Locke and Limborch became close friends. Their wide-ranging discussions also included exchanges on the freedom of will. Limborch’s contributions to the debate showed that the Arminian line of analysis was still very much alive. Much more than Arminius had done, Limborch exalted the will and human freedom. He defined the will “as that Act of the Soul by which it is inclined to any Object that is proposed to it under the Notion of Good.” Freedom was, Limborch went on to argue, the true “Property of the Will (...) whereby the Will has an Authority over its own Action, either of

61 Thomas Hobbes, “Of Liberty and Necessity,” in Vere Chappell (ed.), *Hobbes and Bramhall on Liberty and Necessity*, p. 16.

62 Thomas Hobbes, “Of Liberty and Necessity,” in Vere Chappell (ed.), *Hobbes and Bramhall on Liberty and Necessity*, 30.

63 Thomas Hobbes, “Of Liberty and Necessity,” in Vere Chappell (ed.), *Hobbes and Bramhall on Liberty and Necessity*, 39.

64 James A. Harris, *Of Liberty and Necessity. The Free Will Debate in eighteenth-Century British Philosophy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

doing or not doing it.”⁶⁵ In order to distinguish between Understanding and Will, Limborch claimed that this freedom was the moment “of an active Indifference, whereby having all things requisite for Action, it may act or not act, and may do this rather than that.”⁶⁶

In response Locke took a certain distance from his friend and started to develop his own theory of the will, its freedom and its relation to human understanding. In the multiplicity of strands that have made up Europe's modernities and in the modern twists and twirls of Europe's minds Hobbes and Locke have played a much more prominent role than Arminius and Gomarus. Thanks to Hobbes, Locke and many others the debate on the human will and its freedom moved rapidly from the intellectual legacy of ‘hot protestantism’. But, though much against their will, ‘hot protestants’ had brought the debate from the halls of academia to the forum of pamphleteering and public debate—if anything, that was a unique contribution to the making of the modern European mind.

65 Philippus van Limborch, *A Compleat System or Body of Divinity, both Speculative and Practical, founded on Scripture and Reason*, vol 1, (London: J. Taylor and A. Bell, 1713), 139. For Van Limborch see Pieter Barnouw, *Philippus van Limborch* (The Hague: Mouton and Co, 1963) and Luisa Simonutti, *Arminianesimo e tolleranza nel Seicento olandese. Il carteggio Ph. van Limborch—J. le Clerc* (Florence: Olschki, 1984). For Locke and Limborch see Luisa Simonutti, “Religion, Philosophy and Science: Locke and the Limborch's Circle,” in J.E. Force, D.S. Katz (eds.), *Everything Connects: In Conference with Richard H. Popkin* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 295–324; Luisa Simonutti, “Necessità, indifferenza, libertà. I Rimostranti e Locke,” in Luisa Simonutti (ed.), *Dal necessario al possibile. Determinismo e libertà nel pensiero anglo-olandese del XVII secolo* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2001), 135–175 and John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

66 Limborch, *A Compleat System or Body of Divinity*, 141.