

Free Choice in Early Modern Reformed Theology

Module: Theology

Dr. Michael J. Lynch, Teaching Fellow

Course Description

How is free choice possible in a world determined by God's will? What is the nature of human choice, and how does God's foreknowledge preserve man's moral responsibility? Although Christians today sometimes act like they are the first to raise such questions, we are heirs of a rich literature wrestling with these difficult questions. This class will focus on early modern Reformed expositions of free choice in their theological, philosophical, and historical contexts. Generally speaking, the course will cover the 16th–18th centuries, although classical and medieval treatments on the question of free choice will inevitably provide the background to much of the class material.

Course Format

The format of the course will be predominantly one of guided discussion. The instructor will often be doing most of the talking, but generally to illuminate and draw out themes from the text for discussion, rather than in straight-up lectures. Thus, students will be expected to come having read and engaged with the text selection for the week, and with thoughts prepared to contribute.

Class readings will focus both on primary and secondary literature. General weekly reading will average around 100 pages.

Classes will meet via Zoom for two hours each week and will be recorded for later viewing by students who cannot participate. Additional student participation and instructor interaction can take place on our Discord channel.

Course Objectives

Objectives for this course include: (1) to discuss how early modern Reformed theologians understood human free choice; (2) to appreciate the ancient and medieval background to early modern discussion of human freedom (3) to explore how various theological doctrines, such as God's foreknowledge, relate to human free choice (4) to better understand some of the more influential early modern views on free choice associated with Molinism, *praemotio physica*, etc. (5) to examine early modern faculty psychology (6) to remark on the various scholastic distinctions at play in early modern expositions of human free choice.

Auditing

Auditors are not required to attend class live or submit assignments, but can participate in Zoom meetings, Discord, Google Classroom, and access recordings. If the time does not work for you, you can switch to auditing or to another course. Students are entitled to a full refund if the chosen time does not work for them. Please email Lynette Hughes at registrar@davenantinstitute.org with any changes, requests, or questions.

Course Requirements

1. Weekly readings (due before our meeting each week).
2. Weekly interaction with fellow participants and the instructor in live class sessions.
3. Students taking the class for credit or for a degree can have (at most) two excused absences from live class participation without penalty.

Additional Course Requirements for Course Credit and Degree Seekers:

1. Attentive and sustained participation in class is the primary requirement. For-credit students may have two excused absences. (20% of final grade) [All Students]
2. Weekly (10) 1-page, typed, **single** spaced, in 12-point Times New Roman font, reflections which engage with the assigned readings for that day. These may range from a simple digest of the material to an engagement with and reflection upon a single aspect of the reading. (25% of final grade) [Degree Seeking Students Only]
3. Oral examination: At the conclusion of the course, the professor will schedule a 15-30-minute Zoom session to assess you on your mastery of the relevant concepts and material from the course. (25% of final grade) [Degree Seeking Students Only]
4. One (1) 12–15-page essay exploring a topic related to the course and approved by the instructor. More details to come. (50% of final grade) [For-Credit Students Only].
5. Weekly (10) Reading Questions. In order to stimulate discussion, Write 5 thoughtful questions for in-class discussion. (30% of final grade) [All Students]

Grading Scale

A	93–100%
A-	90–92.99%
B+	87–89.99%
B	83–86.99%

B-	80–82.9%
C+	77–79.99%
C	73–76.99%
C-	70–72.99%
D+	67–69.99%
D	63–66.99%
D-	60–62.99%
F	59.99% or less

Course Texts

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

Beck, Andreas J. *Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676) on God, Freedom, and Contingency: An Early Modern Reformed Voice* (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

Freddoso, Alfred J. “Preface,” in Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge [...]*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988. [To be provided.]

Muller, Richard A. *Divine Will and Human Choice: Freedom, Contingency, and Necessity in Early Modern Reformed Thought*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017.

Suarez, Francisco, *On Efficient Causality: Metaphysical Disputations 17, 18, and 19*. Translated by Alfred J. Freddoso. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994. [To be provided.]

Synopsis Purioris Theologiae, Synopsis of a Purer Theology. Volume 2/Disputations 24–42 edited by Henk van den Belt. Translated by Riemer A. Faber. Leiden: Brill, 2016. [To be provided.]

Course Schedule

Wee k	Dates	Discussion Topics	Secondary Reading	Primary Reading
1	6/1–7	State of the Question and Historiography	Muller, 11–79	

2	6/8–14	Aristotle and Aquinas on Human Freedom	Muller, 83–138	Augustine, City of God, V.9–10; Aquinas, ST, Prima Pars, Q. 83
3	6/15–21	Introduction to Early Modern Expositions of Free Choice	van Asselt, 15–49	<i>Synopsis</i> , 406–431
4	6/22–28	Zanchi on Free Choice	Muller, 139–77	van Asselt, 51–93
5	6/29–7/5	Junius on Free Choice	Muller, 181–210	van Asselt, 95–125
6	7/6–12	Gomarus on Free Choice	Muller, 211–57	van Asselt, 127–44
7	7/13–19	Voetius on Free Choice	Beck, <i>Gisbertus Voetius</i> , 439–65	van Asselt, 145–70
8	7/20–26	Turretin on Free Choice	Muller, 258–324	van Asselt, 171–200
9	7/27–8/2	Late Reformed Orthodoxy on Free Choice	Muller, “JE and the Absence of Free Choice;” Helm, “JE and the Parting of the Ways?” [Both to be provided.]	van Asselt, 201–29
10	8/3–8/9	Dominicans, Jesuits, and Conclusion	Freddoso: 1–81 (esp. 24–28); van Asselt: pgs. 231–42	Suarez, On Efficient Causality, 270–326