

Williams, Thaddeus J  
Biola University

## Paper dolls: Vincent Brümmer's notion of autonomy

### ABSTRACT

Autonomy is what may be called a “chromosomal doctrine” insofar as it has a profound, non-reciprocal shaping effect on other doctrines within a theological system. This article provides a case study in chromosomal doctrine from the theology of Vincent Brümmer. The analysis detects two strands in Brümmer’s notion of autonomy and ways in which they shape Brümmer’s concept of God as a “vulnerable” relationship seeker. Specifically, Brümmer interprets “two-way ability” as a condition of autonomy, and autonomy as a condition of “a relationship of love.” These two strands lead Brümmer to the conclusion that “God necessarily assumes vulnerability in relation to [His creatures].” This study proposes a modification of Brümmer’s notion of autonomy to avoid reducing creatures to indifferent agents, while maintaining God’s unique power to reform human hearts. Can the Creator cause his creatures to love without violating our autonomy or turning us into ‘Paper Dolls’?

Autonomy is what may be called a “chromosomal doctrine.” The metaphor holds insofar as certain notions occupy such a rudimentary level within a theological system that they predictably shape many doctrinal contours of that system (with an almost *genetic* determinism). Such theological chromosomes often carry a ‘one way’ causal power akin to biological chromosomes. As chromosome pairs 15 and 19 in humans may play a strong role in causing one’s eye color (without one’s eye color, in turn, shaping those chromosome pairs), so certain doctrines seem to largely determine the hue of other doctrines in a non-reciprocal way. For example, a theologian who makes a Platonic distinction between the *real* us and our transitory material bodies would likely manifest hues of docetism as his Christological vision forms. His docetism did not make him a Platonist; his Platonism made him a docetist. Evidence for the existence of such chromosomal doctrines can be found in the fact that theology develops into more-or-less coherent and distinct systems through the centuries (some systems as diverse from each other as a lion from a tuna fish). Different chromosomal doctrines will generate a whole other “animal.” This article offers a case study in chromosomal doctrine from the theology of Vincent Brümmer. Specifically, we explore Brümmer’s notion of autonomy and its powerful shaping effect on his concept of God as a “vulnerable” relationship seeker.

### 1. THE TWOFOLD STRUCTURE OF AUTONOMY

As chromosomes are composed of DNA strands, we may ask: what are the “DNA strands” within Brümmer’s chromosomal doctrine of autonomy? In *The Model of Love*, Brümmer posits “two-way ability” as a necessary condition of autonomy:

Since choice is always between alternative courses of action, doing something out of choice entails the two-way ability to do both what one chooses to do and to act otherwise as well. For this reason freedom of choice is incompatible with determinism: one cannot choose to

do the unavoidable since the unavoidable leaves no alternative but to do it.<sup>1</sup>

Brümmer clarifies his notion of autonomy as a form of indeterminism, or a “libertarian” view of free will. In the libertarian view of free will as spelled out by Brümmer (along with ancient Greek philosophers and many contemporary theologians<sup>2</sup>), an agent has an irreducible power to act as a first-mover to perform or refrain from performing a given action. If we lose this “two-way ability” (or what has been branded “the ability to do otherwise,” “the power of contrary choice,” or Harry Frankfurt’s technical term, “the Principle of Alternate Possibilities”), then we are no longer “autonomous” in Brümmer’s meaning of the term.<sup>3</sup>

To “two-way ability” Brümmer adds a second strand in his doctrine of autonomy. He posits autonomy as a necessary condition of meaningful love relationships. He illustrates this with lyrics from the song ‘Paper Doll’:

I’m goin’ to buy a paper doll that I can call my own,  
A doll that other fellows cannot steal.  
And then those flirty flirty guys  
With their flirty flirty eyes  
Will have to flirt with dollies that are real.  
When I come home at night she will be waiting.  
She’ll be the truest doll in all the world.  
I’d rather have a paper doll to call my own  
Than have a fickle-minded real live girl.

Brümmer observes,

Far from being a love song, this is a lament on the absence of love. In the words of Sartre: If the beloved is transformed into an automaton, the lover finds himself alone—alone with his paper doll. It is clear that a relationship of love can only be maintained as long as the personal integrity and free autonomy of *both* partners is upheld.<sup>4</sup>

Brümmer defines autonomy as the antithesis of coercion. An agent is either autonomous or coercively reduced to an “automaton,” and automatons do not make good lovers. While other DNA strands exist in Brümmer’s chromosomal doctrine of autonomy,<sup>5</sup> these two strands—autonomy as a “two-way ability” that forms a necessary condition for a “relationship of love”—form the focus of the present analysis.

What shaping effect does this twofold structure of autonomy have on Brümmer’s theology? How might it “color” his understanding of God as a relationship seeker? Says Brümmer:

Since love is a reciprocal relation, God is also dependent on the freedom and responsibility

---

1 Vincent Brümmer, *The Model of Love: A Study in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 45.

2 For an extensive bibliography of libertarian free will in Hellenistic thought and contemporary analysis see Thaddeus Williams, *Love, Freedom, and Evil: Does Authentic Love Require Free Will?* in *Currents of Encounter*, vol. 41 (Amsterdam: Rodopi Editions 2011), 13-18.

3 Harry Frankfurt, “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 66 (1969) 829. A small handful of contemporary libertarians have broken with the mainstream libertarian view by denying PAP as a necessary condition for freedom. See David Hunt, “Moral Responsibility and Buffered Alternatives” in *Free Will and Moral Responsibility*, ed. Peter French and Howard Wettstein (Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 126-145.

4 Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 161. Emphasis in original.

5 A third DNA strand in Brümmer’s notion of autonomy (and one that lies beyond the scope of this study), is autonomy as a *divine gift* (See *The Model of Love*, 162-63). In viewing autonomy as a divine gift, Brümmer aligns himself with long-standing traditions in Hellenistic philosophy (See Williams, *Love, Freedom, and Evil*, 17 fn. 41-42).

of human persons in order to enter into a loving relation with them... Nevertheless, in creating human persons in order to love them God necessarily assumes vulnerability in relation to them.<sup>6</sup>

There is an inescapable element of risk for *anyone* seeking “a relationship of love” with autonomous agents, the risk that their active “two-way ability” will choose *against* the relationship. Brümmer is far from alone in his contention that love requires autonomy and autonomy requires vulnerability, *even for God*. This contention is behind John Sanders’ “God Who Risks,”<sup>7</sup> Geddes MacGregor’s theory of divine *kenosis* in which God’s love “is the abdication of power,”<sup>8</sup> and Simone Weil’s view of creation as an act of divine “abandonment” to make room for our “free and autonomous existence.”<sup>9</sup> Brümmer adds:

[I]f God did not grant us the ability to sin and cause affliction to him and to one another, we would not have the kind of free and autonomous existence necessary to enter into a relation of love with God and with one another.<sup>10</sup>

Why does autonomy as a chromosomal doctrine manifest so consistently as what may be called the “trait doctrine” of divine vulnerability? An answer can be found by positing a scenario in which autonomy functions chromosomally *without* manifesting the trait doctrine of divine vulnerability. The theologian could simply deny that God seeks “a relationship of love” with his creatures. The relationally disengaged deity of Epicurus, Voltaire, and other deists could remain absolutely *invulnerable* before his autonomous creatures to the extent that he is apathetic about relating with them. Such a blocking mechanism is, of course, not present in any Christian system. Any Christian system must reckon with the reality of a God who *is* love and who uniquely (and even painfully) demonstrates His love in the person and work of Jesus. Once Brümmer’s twofold notion of autonomy operates at the chromosomal level of a theology, the theologian *must* embrace some doctrine of divine vulnerability if he seeks to understand God as a God of love.

## 2. THE RELATIVITY OF AUTONOMY

Many biblical passages seem difficult to square with a doctrine of divine vulnerability. The God of Isaiah 46:10 says, “My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.” Job says of God, “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted” (Job 42:2). The Psalmist sings to a God who “does all that he pleases” (Ps. 115:3) and Paul’s worshipped a God who “works all things according to the counsel of his will” (Eph. 1:11). Such passages about a seemingly *invulnerable* God ought to open us to ask: Is it possible for humans to be autonomous and God to be loving, without requiring that He “necessarily assumes vulnerability”?<sup>11</sup>

On Brümmer’s twofold view of autonomy, no such possibility is open. Since Brümmer’s autonomy requires “two-way ability,” we must have the power to resist all of God’s pursuits for our hearts, and God “necessarily assumes vulnerability in relation to [us]” (emphasis added). Are other accounts of “autonomy” available to the Christian theologian that do not lead “necessarily” to divine vulnerability? To approach this question and to further clarify

---

6 Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 162-63.

7 See John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998).

8 See Geddes MacGregor, *He Who Lets Us Be: A Theology of Love* (New York, NY: The Seabury Press, 1975), 333.

9 Simone Weil, *Gateway to God* (London: Fontana Press, 1974), 80.

10 Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 163.

11 Affirming the invulnerability of God is compatible with a God who genuinely grieves at His creatures’ self-destructive choices. For analysis see Williams, *Love, Freedom, and Evil*, 83-101.

Brümmer's perspective, we must recognize the relativity of the term autonomy (and its synonym "freedom"). "Autonomy" and "freedom" (which I am using interchangeably) are abstract nouns seeking a concrete object bridged by the preposition "from." An agent can have freedom *from* a debilitating disease (often expressed shorthand as "health"), freedom *from* work (expressed shorthand as "vacation"), freedom *from* parental control (expressed shorthand as "college"), or freedom from the luxury of doing things your own way (expressed shorthand as "marriage"). Robust accounts of freedom require us to specify what precisely the agent is free *from*. It is this vast relativity of freedom, an abstract noun that can be linked by the preposition "from" to such a diverse range of objects that gives the notion its perennial and pan-cultural appeal.

"Freedom from *x*" in the above contexts is synonymous with the first strand of Brümmer's notion of autonomy, namely, "two-way ability." Freedom can be expressed formally as:

Some agent, Jones, has freedom from some object, *X*, to do some action, *A*, if relative to the cumulative causal powers of *X*, Jones can still choose *A* or refrain from choosing *A*.

We can apply this formula to Brümmer's notion of autonomy by stipulating *X* in four distinct ways:

Some agent, Jones, has freedom from [the Machine] to do some action, *A*, if relative to the cumulative causal powers of *the physical world*, Jones can still choose *A* or refrain from choosing *A*.

Some agent, Jones, has freedom from [the Gunman] to do some action, *A*, if relative to the cumulative causal powers of *coercive persons*, Jones can still choose *A* or refrain from choosing *A*.

Some agent, Jones, has freedom from [the Heart] to do some action, *A*, if relative to the cumulative causal powers of *his internal character propensities*, Jones can still choose *A* or refrain from choosing *A*.

Some agent, Jones, has freedom from [the Reformer] to do some action, *A*, if relative to the cumulative causal powers of *divine action*, Jones can still choose *A* or refrain from choosing *A*.

Failing to specify "two-way ability" with these relative clauses may cause us to overlook significant ways in which an agent can be simultaneously free and not free with regard to the same action. Consider a case in which a friend offers Jones a mug of ale. It is *logically possible* for Jones to have Freedom from the Machine, the Gunman, and the Reformer, while lacking Freedom from the Heart. Relative to the physical world, coercive persons, and divine action, Jones can drink or refrain from drinking. He is free insofar as mechanistic physical factors do not determine him to drink. He is free insofar as his friend does not hold him at gunpoint forcing him to drink. He is free insofar as God has not predestined him to drink. It is possible for those three freedoms to be co-exemplified, while simultaneously Jones' internal character propensities are such that he cannot refrain from the mug of ale. Perhaps the beliefs, desires, and aversions that form his "Heart" leave Jones no alternative but to drink.

Would Jones still have "freedom" in such a scenario? Recall Brümmer's claim that, "freedom of choice is incompatible with determinism: one cannot choose to do the unavoidable since the unavoidable leaves no alternative but to do it."<sup>12</sup> Jones does not meet Brümmer's libertarian conditions of freedom. However, this conclusion overlooks significant ways in which Jones is free with regard to drinking the offered ale. Perhaps Jones has had his head filled at the university

12 Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 45.

with Jacques Monod's *Chance and Necessity* in which "man is a machine."<sup>13</sup> Perhaps he has rationalized hurtful moral patterns in his life with the view that, as a biological robot, he just cannot help it. Jones' Freedom from the Machine is significant to the extent that he can take responsibility for his actions and is no longer reduced to "a digestive tube" (Pierre Cabanis), "a being purely physical" (Paul d'Holbach), "a bulb with thousands of roots" (G.C. Lichtenberg), "a package of tepid, half-rotted viscera" (Louis Ferdinand Celine), or "just an aggregate of trillions of cells" (Jean Ronstand). Such Freedom is highly significant, *even if Jones lacks Freedom from the Heart*.

Or perhaps Jones was raised in an authoritarian, prohibitionist home. Being offered ale where he can express his heart's strongest desires without any Gunmen forcing him to refrain is a significant freedom *regardless of whether or not he can choose contrary to his strongest desires*. Indeed, Freedom from the Gunman is highly significant to slaves or citizens living under tyrants. Such freedom is so significant that many are willing to have their own blood shed in resistance to Gunmen. They do not pay the ultimate price for Freedom from the Heart—two-way ability *relative to their own desires* – but for Freedom from the Gunman – two-way ability to express their own desires *relative to coercive authorities*.

On this relative analysis of freedom, the answer to whether Jones is free is both 'yes' and 'no.' Yes, Jones has Freedom from the Machine, the Gunman, and the Reformer since the causal forces of the physical world, coercive agents, and divine action leave room for Jones to exercise two-way ability. On the other hand, we may consistently answer 'no,' given Jones' lack of two-way ability relative to his own Heart. On this relative view, it is logically possible for both determinism and indeterminism to hold true in a single agent with regard to the same action. This compatibility can be seen in the fact that the two claims below do not entail a logical contradiction:

**C1:** Jones *necessarily* drinks the ale *relative to his own heart*.

**C2:** Jones *freely* drinks the ale *relative to the physical world, coercive agents, and divine action*.

The advocate of libertarian free will has two foreseeable moves at this point: First, he could argue that C1 and C2 do entail a logical contradiction. Yet the logical contradiction only emerges if we strip C1 and C2 of their relative clauses. A more promising libertarian response would be to accept C1 and C2 as logically consistent, but deny that, *on the whole*, Jones is significantly free. This response can be seen in the words of libertarian, Clark Pinnock:

It is not enough to say that a free choice is one which, while not externally compelled, is nonetheless determined by the psychological state of the agent's brain or the nature of the agent's desiring. To say that Harry stole the candy bars because he wanted them is obvious—the question is, could he have refrained from stealing them in spite of his desire? The idea of moral responsibility requires us to believe that actions are not determined either internally or externally.<sup>14</sup>

Pinnock clarifies that a libertarian account of "two-way ability" requires more than mere Freedom

---

13 Jacques Monod, *Chance and Necessity* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 180.

14 Clark Pinnock, "God Limits His Knowledge," in *Predestination and Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*, ed. David Basinger and Randall Basinger (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 149. For similar libertarian accounts see Robert Kane, *Free Will and Values* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 53; and J.P. Moreland and Scott Rae, *Body & Soul* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 126.

from the Machine, the Gunman, and the Reformer. It requires the agent to also exercise Freedom from the Heart. “Harry” only freely steals candy bars if “he could have refrained from stealing them in spite of his desire.” Given these requirements, we can see why the libertarian would not consider Jones significantly free when offered ale. Since his Heart leaves him no alternative but to drink, Jones cannot be considered a significantly free agent. A libertarian understanding of “two-way ability” (the first strand in Brümmer’s notion of autonomy) entails Freedom from the Heart.

### 3. “TWO-WAY ABILITY” AND TOO MUCH AUTONOMY

Returning to our genetic metaphor, chromosomes are made up of DNA strands, which are themselves composed of four base sequences (a particular arrangement of adenine, guanine, cytosine, and thymine, or A-G-C-T). We can detect a similar four base sequence in the “two-way ability” strand of Brümmer’s notion of autonomy. Because “freedom of choice is incompatible with determinism”<sup>15</sup> Brümmer’s strand of “two-way ability” requires *all four* freedoms above (e.g., if Jones only has Freedom from the Machine, the Gunman, and the Reformer, but lacks Freedom from the Heart, then Jones is determined and, thus, lacks “freedom of choice”). Brümmer’s “two-way ability” strand may be pictured as an M-G-H-R sequence (Freedom from the Machine, Gunman, Heart, and Reformer). In the remainder of this analysis, I argue that the Freedom from the Heart and the Reformer (i.e., the H and R in his Brümmer’s strand of “two-way ability”) carry significant problems. I will argue that a M-G sequence (“two-way ability” understood as Freedom from the Machine and the Gunman, but *not* Freedom from the Heart and Reformer) affords us with an alternative notion of autonomy that does not generate such problems.

I begin with the H-base in Brümmer’s sequencing of “two-way ability.” Upon closer look, Freedom from the Heart seems to leave the agent autonomous not only from forces *outside himself*, but also from those *within himself* in a problematic way. To illustrate the problem let us grant Jones Freedom from the Heart. Jones’ friend offers the mug, at which point Jones’ “self” (with all of its desires for ale, his aversions to thirst, his propensities for merrymaking, his deliberations about wanting to unwind after a long day at the office) begins to culminate as a pro-ale choice. If these internal factors *determine* Jones to reach for the mug, then he no longer possesses Freedom from the Heart (and cannot be autonomous in Brümmer’s sense of the term). Jones must remain autonomous enough from that “self” to resist its pro-ale push.

Suppose that this “deeper self”<sup>16</sup>—the Jones who remains autonomous enough to resist the push of pro-ale Jones—does, in fact, choose to go along with the desires of pro-ale Jones. Did this autonomous Jones himself have desires that were in favor of pro-ale Jones? Was autonomous Jones himself *pro* (in favor of) pro-ale Jones? If not, then why, from such a state of indifference, did autonomous Jones go along with pro-ale Jones? If so, then Freedom from the Heart requires us to posit a still-more-autonomous Jones who can resist the push of this pro-ale Jones. Where the story goes from here is predictable. We are left with either a Jones who is truly autonomous from all desires, who is *pro-nothing* and, thereby, profoundly indifferent, or a Jones who is pro-pro-pro-pro, *ad infinitum*. Neither agent seems to be a prime candidate for making significantly free choices.<sup>17</sup>

---

15 Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 45.

16 See Susan Wolf, *Freedom within Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 14.

17 The libertarian may reply that Jones may still choose *for* a desire. However, there is a qualitative difference between *desirously choosing* and *desirelessly choosing for a desire*. In the first case, precluded by libertarianism, the desire is an intrinsic property of the agent. In the second case, the desire does not

Gottfried Leibniz and Harry Frankfurt clarify this critique of Freedom from the Heart. Leibniz illustrates Freedom from the Heart as follows:

One will have it that the will alone is active and supreme, and one is wont to imagine it to be like a queen seated on her throne, whose minister of state is the understanding, while the passion are her courtiers or favourite ladies... [The queen] can vacillate between the arguments of the ministers and the suggestions of her favourites, even rejecting both, making them keep silence or speak, and giving them audience as it seems good to her.<sup>18</sup>

We may add detail to this Leibnizian picture with Frankfurt's distinction between first and higher-order desires,<sup>19</sup> and reach the following scenario: Suppose we place Jones on the throne. A first-order desire—the desire to drink the offered ale—makes a case from King Jones' courtyard. If the King uses his active power to royally endorse this first-order desire, then he either desires to choose the first-order desire or he does not. If not, then King Jones is indifferent toward his courtiers that beckon him to drink. If, on the other hand, he *does* desire to choose this first-order desire, then Brümmer's notion of "two-way ability" demands that this second-order desire is itself resistible. For this second-order desire to be resistible, King Jones must preside over it in such a way that he may royally endorse or reject it. Thus, the second-order desire moves outside of King Jones the choice-maker, and into the courtyard with all other desires. If he chooses in favor of that second-order desire, then he either desires that second-order desire or he does not. If not, then we have slipped back into indifference. If so, then that third-order desire must be resistible (in which case it joins ranks with all other desires in the courtyard).

This tiresome story forces us into a dilemma in which either:

- 1) King Jones desirelessly (i.e., indifferently) chooses to royally endorse the first-order desire to drink. Or:
- 2) King Jones faces the impossible task of royally endorsing an infinite amount of higher-order desires.

Libertarians have opted for the first option. This explains why libertarians throughout history (e.g., Schopenhauer in his *Prize Essay*, Descartes in his *Meditations*, and Melabranche in his *Search After Truth*) have used the term "indifference" to describe their views. Although most contemporary libertarians jettison this term, Brümmer aligns himself with historic libertarians when he affirms that, "'liberty of indifference' ... should be taken as specifying a necessary condition for an adequate concept of moral freedom."<sup>20</sup>

What happens, however, if we remove Freedom from the Heart from our concept of two-way ability? In this case, we can retain the agent's two-way ability relative to the Machine and the Gunman, but are no longer driven to the conclusion of an indifferent agent.<sup>21</sup> The case for removing Freedom from the Heart from our understanding of two-way ability becomes more compelling when seen in relation to Brümmer's second strand of autonomy—autonomy as a condition for "a relationship of love." If autonomy requires Freedom from the Heart, and Freedom from the Heart, in turn, leads to an indifferent agent, then we face a problem in this

---

enter into the agent's innermost nexus of active power, and we are left with an indifferent agent.

18 Leibniz, *Theodicy*, tr. E.M. Huggard (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, [1710] 1985), 421.

19 See Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," in *Free Will*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Gary Watson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 81-95.

20 Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 45 fn. 7.

21 We can add that indifferent agents bear little resemblance to the moral agents we meet in the Bible. See Williams, *Love, Freedom, and Evil*, 162-163.

second strand. Indifference becomes a *necessary condition* of love. Yet, as I argue elsewhere, “being a lover entails a desire for the welfare of the beloved.”<sup>22</sup> Brümmer concurs in seeing “a policy of commitment in relation to the beloved” as a distinguishing hallmark of love relations.<sup>23</sup> A lover can no more be indifferent toward his beloved’s welfare than a Dodgers fan can be indifferent about the Dodgers’ Major League Baseball record. An indifferent agent does not merit the title of “true lover.”

To avoid the problem of indifference, let us consider Jones as a father who loves without Freedom of the Heart. If Jones loves his daughters, and yet his Heart as a father is such that he cannot refrain from loving his daughters, would we dismiss such love as inauthentic? We cannot easily dismiss such love. Suppose by contrast that Jones’ daughters craftily install some Artificial Affection hardware in his brain while he sleeps, a physical mechanism that *forces* him to exhibit love-behavior. The physical necessity and coercion in this scenario strip Jones of autonomy and his love of meaning. To the extent that Jones’ daughters remove their father’s Freedom from the Machine and Gunman, they find themselves alone with their paper dad.

Freedom from the Machine and the Gunman are essential components of the kind of autonomy that love requires. When we include Freedom from the Heart, however, agents become indifferent in a way that jeopardizes their ability to participate in meaningful love relationships. When we remove Freedom from the Heart, we have agents who can desire the welfare of their beloved while remaining autonomous in precisely the ways we want preserved in meaningful love relationships.

#### 4. AUTONOMY AND DIVINE VULNERABILITY

I have offered a case for removing the problematic H-base from the “two-way ability” strand in a chromosomal notion of autonomy. I close with a deeper analysis of the R-base—Freedom from the Reformer as a condition of autonomy. Recall that Freedom from the Reformer expresses the agent’s two-way ability *relative to all divine action*. We have seen that Brümmer’s chromosomal doctrine of autonomy and his commitment to a God of love lead him to affirm a doctrine of divine vulnerability.

Consider God as He seeks a reciprocal love relationship with Jones. Is it possible for God to act so powerfully in Jones’ heart that Jones *cannot* reject a relationship with God *while Jones remains meaningfully autonomous*? This does not represent a real possibility in Brümmer’s theology and it is important to see why. For Brümmer, “It is still up to us as human agents to do God’s will, and if we decide not to do so (in spite of being enlightened, enabled and motivated) then God’s will is not done.”<sup>24</sup> To preserve two-way ability in the Brümmer’s sense, the agent must be able to resist all divine action.

Brümmer’s emphasis on two-way ability relative to divine action can be clearly seen in the way he handles Anders Nygren’s concept of divine *agape*. Brümmer argues that Nygren’s God... *...causes us to love him and each other. This seems to turn God into a kind of Heavenly Conquistador... Clearly such views take love to be a highly impersonal concept and the relationship of love to be a very impersonal manipulative one.*<sup>25</sup>

The way in which Brümmer marshals support for his critique of Nygren’s “highly impersonal

---

22 Williams, *Love, Freedom, and Evil*, 43.

23 Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 159.

24 Brümmer, *What Are We Doing When We Pray? On Prayer and the Nature of Faith*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), 77.

25 Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 159-60. Emphasis in original.



concept” is revealing. Brümmer appeals to Jean-Paul Sartre’s insight that, “The man who wants to be loved does not desire the enslavement of the beloved.”<sup>26</sup> Brümmer then cites the lyrics of ‘Paper Doll’ in which a man “laments” the “absence of love.” It is revealing that both of these examples occur on the limited plane of human-to-human relations. Sartre, an atheist, is not offering commentary of human-divine relationships, and Johnny Black was not writing ‘Paper Doll’ as a hymn about God’s interpersonal abilities. Is it possible that a valid insight on the level of human-to-human relationships becomes fallacious when applied to human-divine relationships?

Jones helps us elaborate on this question. Suppose Jones seeks reciprocal love from a certain available damsel, Jane. Jane’s autonomy entails Jones’ vulnerability. All of Jones’ attempts to woo Jane into a relationship cannot eliminate the risk that Jane will say ‘no’ to the relationship. Jones cannot tolerate that risk. He sets himself to the task *determining* Jane to love him. What means of determination are at Jones’ disposal? To guarantee his desired outcome, he can either abolish her Freedom from the Machine or her Freedom from the Gunman (or both). Of course, the moment Jones violates Jane’s Freedom from the Machine or the Gunman, he ceases to love her as a person and reduces her to a paper doll. If Jones is unwilling to resort to such deterministic tactics, then he must come to terms with the vulnerability that inevitably follows from her autonomy.

Jones’ limitation is our limitation. But is it possible that these limitations do not apply to God as He seeks relationships with His creatures? In approaching this question it is important to see that a God who, unlike us, can bring about love without reducing His lovers to dolls represents not only a possibility, but also an actuality in certain theologies. For Francis Turretin, God draws us into relationship with...

....strength [so] powerful that it may not be frustrated [yet so] sweet that it may not be forced... [God] so sweetly and at the same time powerfully affects the man that he cannot (thus called) help following [Him].<sup>27</sup>

In this theological system we are led not to an affirmation of “divine vulnerability” or to God as a “Heavenly Conquistador,” but to a God whom Augustine describes as the “Delightful Conqueror.”<sup>28</sup> What if God seeks reciprocal love from Jones in this system? In Turretin and Augustine’s view, God is able to guarantee love from Jones in a way that Jones cannot guarantee love from Jane. God can effectively bring Jones to a point of love while sustaining Jones’ Freedom from the Machine and the Gunman.

Indeed, for many people such a God is not merely theoretical, but the God who hears and answers their prayers.<sup>29</sup> As J.I. Packer observes,

You pray for the conversion of others... I think that what you do is pray in categorical terms that God will, quite simply and decisively, save them: that He will open the eyes of their understanding, soften their hard hearts, renew their natures, and move their wills to receive the Savior... You would not dream of making it a point in your prayer that you are not asking God actually to bring them to faith, because you recognize that that is something

---

26 Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 160.

27 Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 2, tr. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James Dennison (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, [1696] 1994), 521, 525.

28 Augustine, *On the Forgiveness of Sins and Baptism*, 2.32 (cited in Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 2, 524).

29 In the famous Prayer of Saint Francis: “O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be loved, as to love.” Thomas á Kempis likewise prayed, “expand my heart with love, that I may feel its transforming power, and may even be dissolved in its holy fire! Let me be possessed by thy love, and ravished from myself” (*The Imitation of Christ*, tr. John Payne [Boston, MA: Gould and Lincoln, 1856], 175-76, 177).

He cannot do... You entreat Him to do that very thing, and your confidence in asking rests upon the certainty that He is able to do what you ask... On our feet we may have arguments about it, but on our knees we are all agreed.<sup>30</sup>

Such prayers are offered neither on the premise of divine vulnerability nor of divine coercion, but on the premise that God can effectively cause us to love without reducing us to paper dolls.

With such prayers we see the need to draw a distinction between Freedom from the Gunman and the Reformer. When creatures exert human action to guarantee love from a fellow creature we become Gunmen. Because we lack the direct access to and definitive authority over our fellow creatures' hearts, we can only eliminate our vulnerability in relation to them by resorting to coercive force. Prayer assumes that God is not bound by this limitation. We would look suspiciously at someone petitioning her fellow creatures to do something to guarantee another's love response. We do not share the same suspicion toward someone who petitions her Creator to do something that would guarantee another's love response.

This distinction we draw in our practice we must also draw in our doctrine. It is precisely this distinction that seems missing in Brümmer's doctrine of "autonomy." This can be seen in Brümmer's assessment of the "Reformation theology" in which, "human beings cannot be agents in relation to God [but] merely objects of divine manipulation."<sup>31</sup> In so caricaturing Reformation theology, Brümmer sees no middle ground between his theological system and an autonomy-abolishing system in which God acts as a divine manipulator. Brümmer continues:

God's agency is not coercive but enabling and motivating and therefore does not deny freedom, responsibility and personal integrity of the human agent... [This is] a matter of co-operation between two agents and not of one agent using the other as a tool.<sup>32</sup>

God is *either* "coercive" and we are mere "tools," *or* divine action is limited to "enabling and motivating" in which case we remain "agents." Brümmer does not see a God who effectively reforms human hearts without trampling our Freedom from the Machine and Gunman as even a *logical possibility*. From Brümmer's analysis it seems as if Augustine, Calvin, Turretin, Jonathan Edwards, and Abraham Kuyper (along with contemporary theologians like D.A. Carson, R.C. Sproul, and Michael Horton) have sought no *via media* between a vulnerable God and a coercive God. From Brümmer's analysis it seems as if there is no biblical evidence for a God who efficaciously draws sinners into love relationships while not obliterating but *enhancing* their freedom.<sup>33</sup>

The foregoing analysis of Brümmer's notion of autonomy helps us to see why he sees no such middle road. On the middle road of Reformation theology, the Creator-creature distinction allows that God can change hearts in ways that we cannot. In seeking to guarantee love from other agents, given our creaturely limitations, we can only become Gunmen, but never the Reformer. Our Creator, by contrast, can draw us irresistibly to love as the Reformer, but never as a Gunman. The salient distinction lies between whether the reciprocated love comes from the agent's heart as a *divinely reformed center of action expressing new supernatural desires now intrinsic to the agent*, or whether it comes from the circumvented heart as a *humanly coerced object expressing not the agent's own desires, but those externally imposed against the agent*. In the second case, the love becomes *less* authentic to the extent that human action coerces the Heart. In the first case, the love becomes *more* authentic to the extent that divine action reforms the Heart.

Given the way in which Brümmer has inseparably sequenced Freedom from the Machine,

---

30 J.I. Packer, *Evangelism & the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1961), 15-17.

31 Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 189.

32 Brümmer, *What Are We Doing When We Pray?*, 75, 76.

33 For exegetical analysis see Williams, *Love, Freedom, and Evil*, 3.2.

the Gunman, the Heart and the Reformer, the authenticity of such love cannot be granted. Such love can only be seen as authentic if we modify our chromosomal doctrine of autonomy from M-G-H-R to M-G. We must see agents as meaningfully autonomous when they enjoy Freedom from the Machine and Gunman while loving from an efficaciously Reformed Heart (as saints presumably love in heaven). If, however, we overlook the Creator-creature distinction in how we seek love,<sup>34</sup> then God's gracious and unique ability to reform our hearts without reducing us to dolls can only be seen as an act of "divine manipulation." In this case, the divine Reformer of Reformation theology will continue to be seen by those beyond that system as a Gunman (except, possibly, when they are "on their knees").

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Brümmer, Vincent. (1993). *The Model of Love: A Study in Philosophical Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (2005). *Atonement, Christology, and the Trinity: Making Sense of Christian Doctrines*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing.
- (2008). *What Are We Doing When We Pray? On Prayer and the Nature of Faith*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing.
- Frankfurt, Harry. (2003). "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person." In: Gary Watson (ed.). *Free Will*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp. 81-95.
- Leibniz, Gottfried. (1985). *Theodicy*. Tr. E.M. Huggard. LaSalle, IL: Open Court.
- MacGregor, Geddes. (1975). *He Who Lets Us Be: A Theology of Love*. New York: The Seabury Press.
- Monod, Jacques. (1972). *Chance and Necessity*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Packer, J.I. (1961). *Evangelism & the Sovereignty of God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Pinnock, Clark. (1986). "God Limits His Knowledge." In: David Basinger and Randall Basinger (eds). *Predestination and Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity.
- Turretin, Francis. (1994). *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*. Vol. 2. Tr. George Musgrave Giger, James Dennison (ed.). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.
- Weil, Simone. (1974). *Gateway to God*. London: Fontana Press.
- Williams, Thaddeus. (2011). *Love, Freedom, and Evil: Does Authentic Love Require Free Will?* Currents of Encounter, Vol. 41. Amsterdam, Editions Rodopi.

## KEY WORDS

Autonomy  
Libertarian  
Freedom  
Love  
Indifference  
Vulnerability  
Power

## KEY WORDS (IN AFRIKAANS)

Outonomie  
Liberalis  
Vryheid  
Liefde  
Onverskilligheid  
Kwesbaarheid  
Krag

---

34 Brümmer does offer three ways that divine love differs from human love (*Atonement, Christology, and the Trinity: Making Sense of Christian Doctrines* [Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2005], 29-31). In light of this, my analysis is a friendly appeal for him to recognize one more difference.