

Guochao (Jason) Zhao

Reformed Covenantal Eudaimonism

Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635-1711) on Highest Good,
Virtue, and Law



Reformed Historical Theology

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Dedicated to Yimeng
my helper and partner towards the promised eternal felicity

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Abstract

Christian theology is ethical in nature. Early modern Reformed theologians were dedicated to both the reformation of doctrine and the reformation of life. However, despite renewed interest in post-Reformation Reformed theology over the last three decades, only a few monographs have been devoted to Reformed ethics. While these studies challenge the traditional view and call for reorientation, they fail to accurately portray early modern Reformed ethics.

This historical study, therefore, seeks to accurately depict the classical formulation of Reformed ethics in the post-Reformation era. Rather than examining practical ethical issues in detail, this study limits itself to the “shape” of Reformed ethics from a theoretical ethical perspective. With the Dutch Reformed pastor and theologian Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635–1711) as a window, this study proposes an integrated model of reorientation. By recognizing that the pursuit of happiness or *eudaimonia* was the dominant theme of pre-modern Christian ethics, this study demonstrates that early modern Reformed theologians appropriated and developed the catholic Christian eudaimonistic tradition, which is structured with the three concepts of highest good, virtue, and law. It argues that Brakel not only continues the catholic Christian eudaimonistic tradition by constructing his ethics in terms of the three concepts, but that he also codifies Reformed contributions by incorporating Reformed covenant theology and soteriology into his interpretive framework, resulting in a Reformed covenantal eudaimonism. By providing the first systematic presentation of Reformed eudaimonism, this study sheds new light on the development of early modern Reformed ethics and offers valuable insights for contemporary ethical discourse.

Abbreviations

CCS	William Ames, <i>Christianae Catecheseos Sciagraphia</i> . Franeker: Bernardus A. Berentsma, 1635.
CRS	Wilhelmus à Brakel, <i>The Christian's Reasonable Service</i> . 4 vols. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011
EC	Zacharias Ursinus, <i>Explicationum Catechetiarum D. Zachariae Ursini Silesii Absolutum Opus</i> . Eds. David Pareus and Quirinius Reuter. Neustadii Palatinatvs: Harnisch, 1598.
HC	Heidelberg Catechism
<i>Institutes</i>	John Calvin, <i>Institutes of the Christian Religion</i> . Trans. Ford Lewis Battles. Library of Christian Classics 20–21. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960.
<i>Institutio</i>	John Calvin, <i>Institutio christianae religionis</i> . Geneva: Stephanus, 1559.
<i>Marrow</i>	William Ames, <i>The Marrow of Theology</i> . Trans. John D. Eusden. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997.
<i>Medulla</i>	William Ames, <i>Medulla theologica</i> . Amsterdam: J.Janssonium, 1634.
NE	Aristotle, <i>Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics</i> . Trans. Roger Crisp. Cambridge University Press, 2014.
PRRD	Richard A. Muller, <i>Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics</i> . 4 vols. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2003.
RG	Wilhelmus à Brakel, <i>Logike latreia, dat is Redelyke godts-dienst</i> . Rotterdam: Johannes de Melander, 1707.
<i>The Commentary</i>	Zacharias Ursinus, <i>The Commentary of Dr. Zachariae Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism</i> . Trans. George W. Williard. Columbus: Scott and Bascom, 1852.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Issue

Christian theology is ethical in nature. Since its earliest formulations, the Reformed doctrine of salvation has raised the question: how then shall one live as a Christian saved by grace alone through faith in Christ alone? That was the challenge of the early Protestant Reformers as well as of those in the Reformed orthodox era to come,¹ who consistently strived for both the *reformatio doctrinae* (reformation of doctrine) and the *reformatio vitae* (reformation of life).² Nevertheless, contemporary scholars in general tend to overlook or undervalue the efforts of their predecessors in the ethical reformation of life, particularly during the post-Reformation era (ca. 1625–ca. 1725). The central concern of this study, therefore, is the classical formulation of Reformed ethics in the post-Reformation era. Rather than examining practical ethical issues in detail, this study will limit itself to the “shape” of Reformed ethics from a theoretical ethical perspective. Both the significance of the topic and the insufficiency of related research necessitate this study.

Indeed, there has been a renewed interest and reappraisal of early modern Reformed theology in the last three decades.³ Recognizing the complexity of continuity and development in intellectual history, various fruitful studies have been carried out on the historical development of Reformed doctrines and Reformed scholasticism. In this revival, however, only a handful of monographs are de-

1 By “Reformed Orthodoxy,” I follow Richard Muller’s definition: “‘Reformed Orthodoxy’ indicates both the confessionally defined teaching of the Reformed churches as well as the era, ca. 1565–1700 or 1720, during which Reformed theologians made their greatest effort in the definition and defense of that confessional teaching.” See Richard A. Muller, *Scholasticism and Orthodoxy in the Reformed Tradition: An Attempt at Definition*, Inaugural Address Calvin Seminary Chapel September 7, 1995 (Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1995), 26.

2 Herman Bavinck, *Created, Fallen, and Converted Humanity*, vol. 1, *Reformed Ethics*, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 274. See also Christoph Strohm, “Ethics in Early Calvinism” in *Moral Philosophy on the Threshold of Modernity*, ed. J. Krayer and R. Saarinen (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), 256.

3 The following works played a crucial role in this revival of interest: 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); *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Carl R. Trueman and R. S. Clark, eds., *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999); Willem J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker, eds., *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).

voted to the field of Reformed ethics.⁴ Moreover, these studies, while shaking up the traditional view of Reformed ethics, often failed to accurately portray the early modern Reformed ethics, as will be discussed in the literature review section. Therefore, this historical study will contribute to the issue by thoroughly investigating the mature development of Reformed ethics in the high Reformed orthodoxy era,⁵ with particular attention to the Dutch and Reformed pastor and theologian Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635–1711). It is suggested that the proposed re-discovery of Reformed covenantal eudaimonism, as represented by Brakel, could clarify current misconceptions of historical Reformed ethics.

4 Most of these monographs focus on seven Reformed individuals: see John Lewis Marshall, “Natural Law and the Covenant: The Place of Natural Law in the Covenantal Framework of Samuel Rutherford’s *Lex, Rex*” (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1995); Christoph Strohm, *Ethik im frühen Calvinismus: Humanistische Einflüsse, philosophische, juristische und theologische Argumentationen sowie mentalitätsgeschichtlichen Aspekte am Beispiel des Calvin-Schülers Lambertus Danaeus* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1996); James Calvin Davis, *The Moral Theology of Roger Williams: Christian Conviction and Public Ethics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004); William J. Danaher, *The Trinitarian Ethics of Jonathan Edwards* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004); Stephen Wilson, *Virtue Reformed: Rereading Jonathan Edwards’s Ethics* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); Elizabeth Agnew Cochran, *Receptive Human Virtues: A New Reading of Jonathan Edwards’s Ethics* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2011); Alison Jane Joyce, *Richard Hooker and Anglican Moral Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Kirk M Summers, *Morality After Calvin: Theodore Beza’s Christian Censor and Reformed Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017). For other moral general treatments, see Stephen J. Grabbill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); John, Jr. Witte, *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion, and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); David Van Druenen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); Jonathan Willis, *The Reformation of the Decalogue: Religious Identity and the Ten Commandments in England, c.1485–1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Marco Hofheinz, *Ethik – reformiert! Studien zur reformierten Reformation und ihrer Rezeption im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017); Elizabeth Agnew Cochran, *Protestant Virtue and Stoic Ethics* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018); Pieter Vos, *Longing for the Good Life: Virtue Ethics after Protestantism* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2020); Nathaniel Warne, *The Call to Happiness: Eudaimonism in English Puritan Thought* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2020).

5 The term “high Reformed orthodoxy era” refers to ca. 1640–1685–1725 when Reformed theology was characterized by increasing precision and polemics. Muller considers Brakel to be one of “the significant theologians” in this era. See Muller, *PRRD*, 1:32. van Asselt’s periodization differs from Muller, but refers to the same thing. See Willem J. van Asselt, “Scholasticism in the Time of High Orthodoxy (ca. 1620–1700),” in *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*, ed. Willem J. Van Asselt et al., trans. Albert Gootjes (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011), 132–166.

1.2 The State of Research

The current state of scholarship will be reviewed in two parts: first, secondary literature regarding the seventeenth-century Reformed theological ethics; second, the study of Wilhelmus à Brakel with a focus on his ethics.

1.2.1 Secondary Literature on Reformed Ethics in the Seventeenth Century

Since the last century, there have been three different narratives in regard to the shape of Reformed ethics: (1) law-based ethics, (2) natural law ethics, and (3) virtue ethics. While the law-based theory is still the dominant voice in academia today, the latter two narratives, from different perspectives, call for a reorientation of the traditional view.

Traditionally, Reformed ethics, both historical and contemporary, is widely understood as law-based ethics grounded on the biblical law of God. In ethical terms, it is commonly labeled as theological voluntarism or divine command ethics,⁶ which posits that which is morally good, and right is determined by God's commands, and thus, moral obligations consist in obedience to the law of God. This traditional view was promoted in Reformed circles by both the neo-Orthodox theologians Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and leading confessional Reformed theologians and ethicists such as Herman Bavinck, Williem Geesink, John Murray, Jochem Douma, Richard J. Mouw, John Frame, and Wayne Grudem.⁷ For example, after facing the challenges of the return of virtue at the end

6 For some philosophers, theological voluntarism and divine command theory should not be viewed as equivalents, rather "that divine command theory is a species of theological voluntarism." See Philip L. Quinn, "Theological Voluntarism," in *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, ed. David Copp (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 63. See also Robert Merrihew Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 261–62; and Mark C. Murphy, "Divine Command, Divine Will, and Moral Obligation," *Faith and Philosophy* 15, no. 1 (1998): 3–27. For a recent counterargument, see C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 37–38.

7 Emil Brunner, *The Divine Imperative* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1947); Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, vol. 1, part 2, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. and trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas Forsyth Torrance (New York: T. & T. Clark International, 2004); *The Doctrine of God*, vol. 2, part 2, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. and trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas Forsyth Torrance (New York: T. & T. Clark International, 2004); *The Doctrine of Creation*, vol. 3, part 4, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. and trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas Forsyth Torrance (New York: T. & T. Clark International, 2004); Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Ethics*; Willem Geesink, *Gereformeerde Ethiek*, 2 vols (Kampen: Kok, 1931); John Murray, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957); Jochem Douma, *The Ten Commandments: Manual for the Christian Life*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R,

of the last century, divine command ethics was fiercely defended by Mouw as “the moral perspective of classical Calvinism.”⁸ Similarly, Frame specifically adopted “the command approach” as the dominant structure of his Reformed ethics, even though he recognized the Bible’s diverse approaches to ethics, including virtue ethics. The reason is simply that it is “in line with the Reformed tradition, which typically expounds Christian ethics in terms of the law of God.”⁹ More recently, in the newly published *Oxford Handbook of Reformed Theology*, Philip Ziegler argued that the law of God “has long been recognized to be at the heart of Reformed ethics.” In fact, “Since its formative centuries, Reformed confessions, catechisms, and theologians have practiced expansive exposition of the decalogue as the *fundamental mode* of ethical reflection and instruction.”¹⁰ Today, this law-based ethics is often simply assumed to be the Reformed ethics since “its formative centuries.” John Calvin (1509–1564) and Reformed catechisms are the most cited authorities to support this traditional view.¹¹

However, the rediscovery of the Reformed natural law theory and virtue theory in recent years has called this traditional narrative into question. In the last three decades, Reformed scholars witnessed the revival of natural law theory.¹²

1996); *Responsible Conduct: Principles of Christian Ethics* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2003); Richard J. Mouw, *The God who Commands: A Study in Divine Command Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990); John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2008); Wayne Grudem, *Christian Ethics: An Introduction to Biblical Moral Reasoning* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018).

8 Mouw, *The God who Commands*, 2–3.

9 Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 326. To be fair, Frame does spend one section on virtue ethics from the existential perspective. See Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 326–348.

10 Philip Ziegler, “Reformed Ethics,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Reformed Theology*, eds. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 585. (Emphasis added)

11 For example, according to Ziegler, “Calvin’s expansive approach to exegesis of the Decalogue is exemplary and formative for Reformed ethics.” See Ziegler, “Reformed Ethics,” 586; John Frame expresses the similar thought: “Part 4 will present biblical ethics in the form of a command ethic (see chapter 3), rather than as a narrative ethic or a virtue ethic. I have decided on this approach partly because it is the dominant one in the Reformed tradition, to which I belong. The Reformed catechisms and many systematic theologies, including Calvin’s *Institutes*, include expositions of the Decalogue.” See John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 385; See also J.R. Mcquilkiln, “Reformed Ethics” in Roland Kenneth Harrison, *Encyclopedia of Biblical and Christian Ethics* (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1987), 346; Richard J. Mouw, *The God who Commands*, 59–75.

12 For recent reappraisal of natural law in Christian tradition in general, see Norman Doe, ed., *Christianity and Natural Law: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); for the Lutheran reappraisal of natural law tradition, see Robert C. Baker and Roland Cap Ehlike, eds., *Natural Law: A Lutheran Reappraisal* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011).

While there are various definitions of natural law theory, Christian natural law theory basically maintains that God implants a universal law in the human nature, which is naturally knowable by all human beings and was initially designed to be the rule of morally good and right. Since natural law ethics has been closely associated with Catholic moral theology for centuries, there were vigorous debates about its role in Calvin's theology in the last century.¹³

Nevertheless, the general consensus in recent years is that Reformed theologians did not only inherit the medieval natural law-tradition "as a noncontroversial legacy,"¹⁴ but also took the "natural-law framework for ethical reflection for granted well into the nineteenth century."¹⁵ This conclusion is built on decades of historical research by a number of scholars including Susan E. Schreiner, John Lewis Marshall, Daniel Westberg, Paul Helm, James Calvin Davis, Stephen Grabill, Aza Goudriaan, John Witte, Jr., David VanDrunen, James E. Bruce, and David S. Sytsma.¹⁶ These scholarly articles and monographs convincingly dem-

13 For an excellent secondary literature review on the discussions of Calvin's natural law theory in the last century, see William Klempa, "John Calvin on Natural Law," in *John Calvin and the Church: A Prism of Reform*, ed. Timothy George (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 72–95.

14 Stephen J. Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics*, 175. Similar thought was expressed by John McNeill in the 1940s: "there is no real discontinuity between the teaching of the Reformers and that of their predecessors with respect to natural law. Not one of the leaders of the Reformation assails the principle." See John T. McNeill, "Natural Law in the Teaching of the Reformers," *Journal of Religion* 26/3 (1946), 168.

15 Jennifer Herdt, "Calvin's Legacy for Contemporary Reformed Natural Law," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 67/4 (2014), 415. There is also a renewed interest in natural law theory in the Lutheran Camp, see Robert C. Baker and Roland Cap Ehlke, eds., *Natural Law: A Lutheran Reappraisal* (St Louis: Concordia, 2011).

16 Susan E. Schreiner, "Their Conscience Also Bears Witness: Natural Law and Societal Life," in *The Theater of His Glory: Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin* (Durham, NC: Labyrinth, 1991), 73–95; John Lewis Marshall, "Natural Law and the Covenant: The Place of Natural Law in the Covenantal Framework of Samuel Rutherford's *Lex, Rex*," Daniel Westberg, "The Reformed Tradition and Natural Law," in *A Preserving Grace: Protestants, Catholics, and Natural Law*, ed. Michael Cromartie (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); Paul Helm, 'Equity, Natural Law, and Common Grace', in *John Calvin's Ideas* (New York: OUP, 2004), 347–88; James Calvin Davis, *The Moral Theology of Roger Williams: Christian Conviction and Public Ethics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004); Stephen J. Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); Aza Goudriaan, *Reformed Orthodoxy and Philosophy, 1625–1750: Gisbertus Voetius, Petrus Van Mastricht, and Antonius Driessen* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 287–324; John Witte, Jr. *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion, and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); James E. Bruce, *Rights in the Law: The Importance of God's Free Choices in the Thought of Francis Turretin* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2013); David S. Sytsma, *Richard Baxter and the Mechanical Philosophers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 216–248. For old scholarship which defends the

onstrate the continuous tradition of Reformed natural law from the early Reformers such as John Calvin, Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562), and John Knox to Reformed orthodox figures including Theodore Beza (1519–1605), Jerome Zanchi (1516–1590), Johannes Althusius (1557–1638), George Gillespie (1613–1648), William Ames (1576–1633), Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1776), Roger Williams (1603–1683), Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661), John Owen (1616–1683), Richard Baxter (1615–1691), Francis Turretin (1623–1687), Petrus van Mastricht (1630–1706), and into the nineteenth century Charles Hodge (1797–1878), and James Thornwell (1812–1862). Although the use of natural law in traditional Reformed ethics is still debatable,¹⁷ the bottom line is that “Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin, followed by all the Protestant orthodox, spoke of natural law.”¹⁸ Therefore, a full portrait of historical Reformed ethics requires the recognition of the role of natural law.

role of natural law in Reformed tradition, see Emil Brunner, “Nature and Grace: A Contribution to the Discussion with Karl Barth,” in *Natural Theology: Comprising ‘Nature and Grace’ by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the Reply ‘No!’ by Dr. Karl Barth*, trans. Peter Frankel (London: Centenary Press, 1946), 15–60; John T. McNeill, “Natural Law in the Teaching of the Reformers,” *Journal of Religion* 26/3 (1946): 168–182; John D. Eusden, “Natural Law and Covenant Theology in New England, 1620–1670,” *Natural Law Forum* 6 (1960): 1–30; David Little, “Calvin and the Prospects for a Christian Theory of Natural Law,” in *Norm and Context in Christian Ethics*, eds. Gene Outka and Paul Ramsey (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1968), 175–97; Lee Gibbs, “The Puritan Natural Law Theory of William Ames,” *Harvard Theological Review* 64.1 (1971): 37–57; Allen Verhey, “Natural Law in Aquinas and Calvin,” in *God and the Good: Essays in Honor of Henry Stob*, eds. Clifton Orlebeke and Lewis Smedes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 80–92; William Klempa, “John Calvin on Natural Law,” in *John Calvin and the Church: A Prism of Reform*, ed. Timothy George (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox, 1990), 72–95.

17 In accordance with his two kingdoms doctrine, VanDrunen advocates a twofold ethics in Reformed tradition, one derived from nature law and governed by human reason and the other from grace and biblical law by the Christian faith. See David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought*, and “‘The Kingship of Christ Is Twofold’: Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms in the Thought of Herman Bavinck,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (April 2010): 147–164. Nelson D. Kloosterman, however, states that “the Reformers never used their doctrine of natural law as the basis for a twofold ethics.” See Nelson D. Kloosterman, “A Response to ‘The Kingship of Christ Is Twofold’: Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms in the Thought of Herman Bavinck by VanDrunen,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (April 2010): 167. Jennifer Herdt also questioned Grabill and VanDrunen’s high expectation of traditional Reformed natural law ethics, see Jennifer Herdt, “Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics by Stephen J. Grabill,” *Modern Theology* 24.1 (2008): 131, and “Calvin’s Legacy for Contemporary Reformed Natural Law,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 67.4: 414–435.

18 Nelson D. Kloosterman, “A Response to ‘The Kingship of Christ Is Twofold’: Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms in the Thought of Herman Bavinck by David VanDrunen,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (April 2010): 166.

The major shift in twentieth-century moral philosophy is the return of virtue after Elizabeth Anscombe and Alasdair MacIntyre.¹⁹ By the end of the last century, virtue ethics had developed into an alternative to deontological ethics and consequential ethics.²⁰ By definition, contemporary virtue ethics could be defined broadly as a virtue-centered ethics which “(a) makes the notion of a virtue prior to right action, in the sense that a virtue can be understood apart from a formula of right action and (b) holds that right action cannot be fully understood apart from an account of the virtues.”²¹ In a similar but more forceful way, contemporary virtue ethics shakes up the traditional understanding of historical Reformed ethics. For our interest, early virtue ethicists, while advocating the restoration of Aristotelian virtue theory, often blamed the Protestant Reformation for its historical decline. The popular narrative, without in-depth historical research, is that the Reformers and their followers by redefining “good” and “right” with God’s absolute, unconditional commandments, replaced the medieval Aristotelian teleological virtue ethics with an ethics of law, which eventually paved the way for secular ethics.²²

This sharp contrast between early modern Protestant ethics and the previous tradition, however, has been widely challenged. Various scholars, mainly historians of moral philosophy, have demonstrated the continuity of moral philoso-

19 See the foundational works of G. E. M. Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy,” *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (1958): 1–19; Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1981). Both Anscombe and MacIntyre are committed Catholics, although MacIntyre converted to Roman Catholicism after the publication of *After Virtue*. The one who deeply influences the recovery of virtue among the Protestants is Stanley Hauerwas with his groundbreaking work *Character and the Christian Life* which first appeared in 1975. See Stanley Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1975).

20 See Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1–2.

21 Daniel Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 66.

22 See Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics: A History of Moral Philosophy from the Homeric Age to the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 1998), 122–123. See also Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 53–54; Servais Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. Mary Thomas Noble (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 284–285; Jean Porter, “Virtue Ethics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. Robin Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 103; Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2012), 269. Noted that all of these scholars are Roman Catholics. Following this narrative, one Protestant theologian even claimed the overthrow of Aristotle’s *Ethics* to be the chief goal of Luther’s Reformation. See Ronald N. Frost, “Aristotle’s *Ethics*: The Real Reason for Luther’s Reformation,” *Trinity Journal*, NS 18 (1997): 223–241.

phy from ancient Greece through the early modern period.²³ While Aristotelian ethics had continued its dominant position in moral philosophy since medieval scholasticism, other Hellenistic schools of philosophy, Platonism, Stoicism, and Epicureanism, all found their way into early modern moral philosophy.²⁴ More recent research further evidences that all of these so-called founders of modern moral philosophy, Francisco Suárez (1548–1617), Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), René Descartes (1596–1650), Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), and David Hume (1711–1776), continued to reflect and work within the virtue ethical tradition,²⁵ while gradually “transforming ethics from

23 See Norman Fiering, *Moral Philosophy in Seventeenth Century Harvard: A Discipline in Transition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981); Jill Kraye, “Moral Philosophy,” in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. Charles Schmitt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 303–386; Charles B. Schmitt and Brian Copenhaver, *Renaissance Philosophy*, vol. 3, *A History of Western Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Jill Kraye, “Conceptions of Moral Philosophy,” in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, vol. 2, eds. Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1284–1285; Jill Kraye and Martin W.F. Stone, eds. *Humanism and Early Modern Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2000); Jon Miller and Brad Inwood, eds. *Hellenistic and Early Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); David A. Lines, “Moral Philosophy in the Universities of Medieval and Renaissance Europe,” *History of Universities* 20, no. 1 (2005): 38–80; Terence Irwin, *The Development of Ethics: A Historical and Critical Study*, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007–2009); Michael Norton, *Fiction and the Philosophy of Happiness: Ethical Inquiries in the Age of Enlightenment* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University, 2012); Jon Miller, ed. *The Reception of Aristotle’s Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); David A. Lines and Sabrina Ebbersmeyer, eds. *Rethinking Virtue, Reforming Society: New Directions in Renaissance Ethics, c. 1350–1650* (Turnhout, 2013); Roger Crisp, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Andreas Helderstedt, ed. *Virtue Ethics and Education from Late Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018); Natasha Constantinidou and Han Lamers, eds. *Receptions of Hellenism in Early Modern Europe, 15th–17th Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

24 See Jill Kraye, “Moral Philosophy,” 325–86; Schmitt and Copenhaver, *Renaissance Philosophy*, 64–66, 127–43, 154–58; Jon Miller and Brad Inwood, eds. *Hellenistic and Early Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

25 See Tobias Schaffner, “Is Francisco Suárez a Natural Law Ethicist?” in *The Concept of Law (lex) in the Moral and Political Thought of the “School of Salamanca,”* Kirstin Bunge et al, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 150–171; Tobias Schaffner, “The Eudaemonist Ethics of Hugo Grotius (1583–1645): Pre-Modern Moral Philosophy for the Twenty-First Century?” in *Jurisprudence* 7 (2016.3): 478–522; R. E. Ewin, *Virtues and Rights: The Moral Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991); David Boonin-Vail, *Thomas Hobbes and the Science of Moral Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Sharon A. Lloyd, *Morality in the Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes: Cases in the Law of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); John Marshall, *Descartes’s Moral Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Donald Rutherford, “On the Happy Life: Descartes vis-à-vis Seneca,” in *Stoicism: Traditions and Transformations*, S. Strange and J. Zupko, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 177–197; Lisa Shapiro, “Descartes’s Ethics,” in *A Companion to Descartes*, Janet Broughton and John

an authority-based to a rationally deductive discipline.”²⁶ It was not until the late eighteenth century with the rise of Kantian deontological ethics and British utilitarianism, which replaced the role of virtue with the concepts of imperatives, oughts, obligations, and the greatest good, that the ancient Greek approach “was challenged as a default way of thinking ethically.”²⁷

Carriero, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 445–463; Noa Naaman Zauderer, *Descartes' Deontological Turn: Reason, Will, and Virtue in the Later Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Frans Svensson, “The Role of Virtue in Descartes’s Ethical Theory, or: Was Descartes a Virtue Ethicist?” *The History of Philosophy Quarterly* 27 (2010): 215–36; Frans Svensson, “Happiness, Well-being, and Their relation to Virtue in Descartes’ Ethics,” *Theoria* 77 (2011): 238–260; Michael Rosenthal, “Tolerance as a Virtue in Spinoza’s Ethics,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 39:4 (2001), 535–557; Nimrod Aloni, “Spinoza as Educator: From Eudaimonistic Ethics to An Empowering and Liberating Pedagogy,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 40.4 (2008), 5; Michael LeBuffe, *From Bondage to Freedom: Spinoza on Human Excellence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Matthew J. Kisner, *Spinoza on Human Freedom: Reason, Autonomy and the Good Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Matthew J. Kisner, Andrew Youpa, ed. *Essays on Spinoza’s Ethical Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Andrea Sangiacomo, *Spinoza on Reason, Passions, and the Supreme Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); J. Taylor, “Virtue and the Evaluation of Character,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Hume’s Treatise*, S. Traiger, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 276; R. Cohon, *Hume’s Morality: Feeling and Fabrication* (Oxford: Oxford University Press); C. Swanton, “Can Hume Be Read as a Virtue Ethicist?” *Hume Studies* 33: 91–113; Jacqueline Taylor, “Hume,” in *Routledge Companion to Sixteenth-Century Philosophy*, Lorraine Besser-Jones, Michael Slote, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015).

26 Kraye, “Conceptions of Moral Philosophy,” 1307.

27 Julia Annas, “Ancient Eudaimonism and Modern Morality,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Ethics*, Christopher Bobonich, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 270. See also Dorothea Alfred, “The Historic Decline of Virtue Ethics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, Daniel C. Russell, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 124–148; Brian Michael Norton, “Ancient Ethics and Modern Happiness: A Study of Three Treatises in Enlightenment Britain,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 38 (2014): 47–74. Even that, however, does not mean the demise of traditional eudaimonism. As one scholar recognizes, “Although Kant’s ethical system breaks from eudaimonism in significant ways, it retains the eudaimonist claim that virtuously informed pursuits of happiness are not only better for virtue, but also better for happiness.” See Erica A. Holberg, “Kant’s Quasi-Eudaimonism,” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 56 (2018.3): 317–341. See also Robert B. Iouden, “Kant’s Virtue Ethics,” *Philosophy* 61 (1986): 473–489; Allen W. Wood, “Kant versus Eudaimonism,” in *Kant’s Legacy*, Predrag Cicovacki, ed. (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2001), 261–282; Robert Johnson, “Happiness as a Natural End,” in *Kant’s Metaphysics of Morals: Interpretative Essays*, Mark Timmons, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 317–330; James Reid, “Morality and Sensibility in Kant: Toward a Theory of Virtue,” *Kantian Review* 8 (2004): 89–114; Lara Denis, “Kant’s Conception of Virtue,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*, Paul Guyer, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 505–537; Anne Margaret Baxley, *Kant’s Theory of Virtue: The Value of Autocracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).