Chapter 3

Gorlæus’ Life

We recall from chapter 1 that Kurd Lasswitz, whose detailed analysis of Gorlaeus’ natural philosophy of 1890 has provided the basis for all subsequent discussions, did not hide his perplexity at this author’s idiosyncratic road to atomism. On the one hand, Gorlaeus’ *Exercitationes philosophicae* (1620) were published in roughly the same years as the first edition of Daniel Sennert’s *De chymicorum cum Aristotelis consensu ac dissensu* (1619); the second edition of Nicholas Hill’s *Philosophia epicurea* (1619); Francis Bacon’s *Instauratio magna* (1620); Sébastien Basson’s *Philosophia naturalis* (1621); Jean d’Espagnet’s *Enchyridion physicae* (1623); and Galileo Galilei’s *Saggiatore* (1623) – all works that contained some corpuscular or atomist concepts. Lasswitz therefore spoke of those years as a time in which “the corpuscular theory had already found wide diffusion and many supporters.” And yet, the peculiarly theological and ontological angle from which Gorlaeus arrived at his own positions looked sufficiently distinct from those chosen by his atomist companions for Lasswitz to decide that he could not view Gorlaeus as a member of an overarching consensus. However, unable to find any reliable information concerning the author’s life and circumstances, he prefaced his textual analysis with that call for additional historical research that we have quoted above: “A monograph on Gorlaeus and on this important decade would be most desirable.”

A good part of the missing biography was unearthed by the Dutch professor of chemistry and historian Frans Maurits Jaeger, who in a seminal article of 1918 presented the results of his research into Gorlaeus’ life and family background. Whereas Lasswitz had merely been able to discover that Gorlaeus had enrolled at Leiden’s theological faculty in 1611, Jaeger managed to establish Gorlaeus’ dates of birth and death, traced his paternal and maternal families, intuited their Arminian link and capped his achievement with his rediscovery of Gorlaeus’ tomb under the wooden floor of the church of Cornjum.

Paradoxically enough, Jaeger’s numerous discoveries rendered Gorlaeus’ philosophical works more mysterious, instead of explaining them. To begin with, knowledge of the exact date of his death permitted the dating of his writings to the period before April 1612; but that unexpectedly early date made our author appear even more original and atypical than Lasswitz had assumed. In addition, the
discovery that these two works had been composed by a twenty-year-old student, who moreover was preparing for a career as a clergyman, rendered them even less comprehensible. As Gorlaeus’ theories could now quite evidently no longer be interpreted as the product of bold abstractions from long scientific practice, they cried out for an additional explanation: what business did an aspiring theologian have with atomistic physics and metaphysics?

Jaeger’s rich article, written in Dutch and published at the end of the First World War in a journal that enjoyed national circulation only, did not come to the attention of scholars outside the Netherlands. Remarkably, most Dutch historians also tended to ignore it, with the single exception of F.A.H. Peeters, who seventy years later republished the *Idea physicae* and had it translated into Dutch and Frisian – a publication that once more did not reach the wider world of learning. All of this explains why no one in a century has attempted to combine Lasswitz’ presentation of Gorlaeus’ philosophy with Jaeger’s biographical findings, let alone search for a solution to the paradoxes that would have resulted from such a combination. Instead, as we have seen in chapter 1, twentieth-century historians of science have taken Gorlaeus to have been an experimental philosopher or even a chemist.

This chapter therefore proposes itself a task that could have been carried out a century ago: namely to complete the reconstruction of Gorlaeus’ short life and to attempt an explanation of his views in the context of his personal circumstances.

### 3.1. Gorlaeus’ Family Background

On his father’s side, David Gorlaeus’ family came from Antwerp. The family Van Goorle (also spelled as Van Gourle, Goirle, Ghooirle, Goerle, Gooirle, Gorle, and Gorlé, and with the Latin form Gorlaeus, used also in the present book) may have taken its name from the village of Goirle, which is situated in today’s Dutch province of North Brabant. At any rate, the family is documented in Antwerp at least since the mid-fourteenth century, where its members were engaged in various trades. David Gorlaeus descends from one Godevaert van Ghoorle Hendricxson (1494-1558), a carpenter and cabinet maker, who had two sons, Peter and Jacob. Peter became a medical doctor and astrologer, who practiced in Antwerp and produced a range of Dutch and French prognostications from the year 1552 onwards, which proudly display the same coat of arms that we find on David Gorlaeus’ tomb (see Figure 6). Professionally speaking, his brother Jacob, the grandfather of our Gorlaeus, followed in his father’s footsteps. When Jacob died in 1559, he left behind a number of children, among whom four by his second wife, Willemken Blockhuys – namely Sara, who would later marry a Dutch satin worker in Rotterdam, Abram; David (Sr.); and Govaert. We do not know whether and
when the family converted to Protestantism. Clearly, David van Goorle and his brothers were Protestants when they entered early into the services the Prince of Orange, probably as financial administrators. It might have been for career reasons that they eventually chose to move from Antwerp to the Northern Netherlands, together with the epicenter of Protestantism and the princely court. We know, at any rate, that three of the four children of Willemken Blockhuys and Jacob van Goorle moved north: Abraham went first, David joined him later, and their sister, Sara, was the last to go.  

It must have been around 1580 that Abraham van Goorle (Antwerp, 1549-Delft, 1608), the uncle of our David Gorlaeus, and David van Goorle, Sr. (Antwerp, 1550-Cornjum, 1612), David Gorlaeus’ homonymous father, crossed over from what is now Belgium into the Netherlands (see Figures 7 and 8). In 1582, Abraham had already left, as his brother David had to represent him in an Antwerp court case surrounding an illegitimate child. But soon thereafter, we find both brothers in the service of the Protestant nobleman Adolf van Nieuwenaar (c. 1545-1589). Van Nieuwenaar, whose family played an important role in the introduction of the Calvinist version of Protestantism in territories that nowadays lie on the German side of the Dutch border, had inherited from his father the county of Limburg and from his uncle the county of Meurs. As a relative of Prince William the Silent, the leader of the Dutch rebellion against the Spanish, Adolf van Nieuwenaar was...
a supporter of this insurrection. When he had to flee to the Netherlands after his defeat in a different conflict (the so-called Cologne Wars), the Dutch welcomed Van Nieuwenaar with open arms, electing him in 1584 to the stadtholderate – the highest executive office – of the Dutch Provinces of Gelderland and of Overijssel, and additionally in 1585 of the Province of Utrecht. At that point, Van Nieuwenaar established his headquarters in Utrecht’s former episcopal palace.

From the extant documents from the 1580s, it appears that the brothers Van Goorle had become respectively counsellor and treasurer to the Count. Because of these functions, they moved in 1585, together with the Count and the rest of the court, to Utrecht, where they settled at the Mariakerkhof.

In 1589, the Count died in a gunpowder incident which took place as he was inspecting new artillery pieces. His childless widow Walburgis (or Walborch) inherited her husband’s possessions. The Van Goorle brothers now entered her services. In fact, Abraham van Goorle named one of his children after his new patron.

In 1591, David van Goorle got married. Utrecht’s Protestant marriage registers contain the following entry:
3 January 1591. David van Goorle, treasurer to the honorable Lady Van Nieuwenaar, living in Utrecht; and Miss Sophia van Martena, living in The Hague. Married in The Hague.¹⁰

The exact date of the marriage in The Hague is unknown. However, only a few days separated their marriage from the birth of their son, David Gorlaeus, who was born on 15 January. That his birthplace was Utrecht, where his father – and obviously now also his mother – resided is testified by the place name Ultrajeticinus, “of Utrecht,” which accompanies his name in all official documents.¹¹

The extreme vicinity of Gorlaeus’ birth to the date of his parents’ marriage is certainly surprising and allows for a number of obvious speculations. Perhaps this situation looked dubious even to Gorlaeus’ contemporaries as according to an eighteenth-century document, he had to obtain a legal certificate in 1609/10 to prove that he was the legitimate child of his parents “through subsequent marriage” (per subsequens matrimonium) – although according to the official dates, he would not have been born out of wedlock.¹²

David Gorlaeus was three years old when his father was sacked in 1594 from his office on charges of fraud and abuse of office. A petition he submitted in Decem-

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ber 1595 to the States-Provincial of Friesland and a letter sent by the latter to their colleagues in Utrecht allow us to conclude that Van Goorle was accused of having counterfeited the Count’s signature back in 1588 in order to declare the Count’s salary twice. This allegation was, according to Van Goorle, false and the result of political machinations. His enemies in the government of the Province of Utrecht, as he furthermore reported in his petition, had in September 1594 confiscated all his possessions. When his wife, Sophia (or Swob, as she was called in her own tongue), had gone to Utrecht to have the family’s belongings shipped to Leeuwarden, she was arrested while having lunch with her brother-in-law, Abraham van Goorle, and was only liberated because the Count of Solms (or possibly his wife) bailed her out. The Frisian States-Provincial accepted Van Goorle’s version of the story. In their letter to their colleagues in Utrecht, they first explained why they felt called upon to defend Van Goorle, arguing that he was “a member of our province, because of the fact that he has married the eldest daughter of Doeke van Martena, one of the most eminent noblemen” of this province. As for the issue at hand, the Frisians argued that Van Goorle had not committed any crime, but had instead been the victim of political intrigue.

Whether Gorlaeus’ father had committed the crime that was ascribed to him or was removed under some false pretext for political reasons is hard to establish on the basis of the known documents. There are some historical circumstances that might point to a political trap. One has to remember that the rebellious Dutch provinces had in the 1580s tried to find a European monarch to protect and rule them before deciding, in 1588, to become a republic. One of the monarchs to whom the Dutch had in vain offered their sovereignty was the English Queen Elisabeth. After the assassination of Prince William of Orange and the ensuing turmoil, the English contacts intensified and resulted in a military treaty (the Treaty of Nonsuch). The arrival of troops in 1585 under the leadership of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, led to a three-year, politically unsuccessful attempt to define the Dutch provinces as an English protectorate, and to institute the Earl of Leicester as the country’s Governor-General. Queen Elizabeth did her best to undermine the success of this costly enterprise. A lack of political backing, Dutch disunity, Spanish military successes and mutinous English troops eventually led to the Earl’s return to England in late 1587. After his departure, factional fighting broke out in various places, including Utrecht, where Leicester had been based. In the end, Leicester’s earlier supporters were removed from local positions of power. In the process, prominently placed Flemish immigrants were similarly eliminated. This process of purification may possibly have constituted the background to the downfall of Gorlaeus’ father, who belonged to that latter group – as did the Count of Nieuwenaar himself, who had first supported, then dropped, the Earl. This interpretation seems to receive further corroboration from the fact that David’s
brother, Abraham van Goorle, decided at the same moment to withdraw from politics, although we are not aware of any accusations that were levelled against him. Furthermore, it appears from documents that from 1597 to her death, the Countess Nieuwenaar paid both David and his brother Abraham a yearly allowance.¹⁷ Even David’s testament of 1612 mentions these payments.¹⁸ This seems to suggest that David Sr. had been cleared of the allegations.

When David van Goorle lost his office, he and his family moved to Martenastate, the mansion of his father-in-law, Doeke van Martena, in Cornjum (see Figure 9). At this point, the life of little David and of his family assumed a Frisian character that was all linked to the Martena family.

David Gorlaeus’ maternal grandfather, Doeke (also spelled as Doecke, Duco or Doco) van Martena (1527/30-1605) was a Frisian nobleman and courtier as well as the head of one of the province’s most famous noble families, which resided in Cornjum at least since the early fifteenth century. In addition to the Cornjum estate, the family also owned city palaces in Franeker and Leeuwarden.

Doeke van Martena, who was destined to be the last scion of this family, became nationally renowned for the role he played in the Frisian and Dutch wars

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Fig. 9: The stately mansion of the Martena family was burnt down in 1572 and subsequently rebuilt in 1584 by Gorlaeus’ parents, Swob van Martena and David van Goorle, whose property it became. Between 1658 and 1899, when it was demolished, the mansion was reconstructed several times. This drawing by Jacobus Stellingwerf shows the Martenastate in c. 1725. (Courtesy of Fries Museum, Leeuwarden)
of independence, and went down in local history as the “Frisian Prince William,” with reference to the leader of the Dutch revolt, William of Orange. First a member of the States-Provincial and since 1564 of the States-Deputed (Gedeputeerde Staten) of Friesland, he early on and very openly sided with the Protestant party, and in due time chose to side with the Orange camp against the Spanish. In the turmoil of the ensuing wars of independence, he was forced to escape from his estate in 1572 when it was burned down by the pro-Spanish Frisian stadtholder Caspar de Robles. Named First Admiral of Friesland by Prince William of Orange in 1573, Van Martena took part in the naval battle of the Zuiderzee. After the so-called Pacification of Ghent in 1576, he could return to his lands, but was taken prisoner in 1580 by the troops of George of Lalaing, Count of Rennenberg, who had succeeded De Robles as stadtholder of the provinces of Friesland, Groningen, Drenthe and Overijssel and who tried for a last time to impose the rights of the Spanish crown on the population. Van Martena was released approximately one year later in a prisoner exchange.

Despite his continuing political role – he was named a member of the States-General – Van Martena was derided by his foes and praised by his friends for the fact that he had consumed “the fortune of three nobles” in the wars and died a poor man. In fact, his poverty explains in part why Gorlaeus’ parents moved to Cornjum. It appears that one of the tasks of David van Goorle was to assist his father-in-law, partly by managing the latter’s finances. When Doeke van Martena died in 1605, his debt to his son-in-law amounted to 2560 florins; this is why the family mansion, the Martenastate, became the property of the Van Goorle family.

We have also just heard that the Martenastate was burned down in 1572. As Doecke van Martena seems to have settled in his city residence in Leeuwarden, it might have been that when David Gorlaeus’ parents left Utrecht to settle in Cornjum in 1594, they first had to reconstruct the castle. That the Martenastate could pass into the hands of the Van Goorles was also due to the fact that the Van Martena family was left without male descendants. Of the six children of Doeke van Martena and his second wife, Catharina Unema (or Trijn Oenema), all four sons died, childless, prior to their father’s death. Doeke’s own death on 11 November 1605 therefore marks the end of the Van Martena dynasty. For this reason, Swob van Martena, David Gorlaeus’ mother and Doeke’s oldest daughter, could take over Martenastate, once her husband, David van Goorle, Sr., had to leave Utrecht. David Gorlaeus’ father died in 1612, a few months after his son. His tomb, like that of his wife, who died in 1614, is located next to their son’s in the local church.
David van Goorle from his position, Abraham moved to Delft in 1595, where he lived as an independent and wealthy burger, dedicating himself to his ever more voluminous collection of coins and seals. Although the two brothers shared a passion for the collecting of antiquities – a passion with which they may well have become infected in their hometown, Antwerp, where collecting was much more en vogue in those days – Abraham’s own collection of coins, engraved gems and sea shells was to become internationally famous, drawing numerous visitors, including some from abroad. Both before and after his death in 1608, parts of his collections ended up in the possession of various European princes, including Henry IV of France, the Prince of Wales (Henry, the son of James I), and Queen Christina of Sweden. Abraham van Goorle, who was always on the lookout for potential buyers, documented his collections in a number of important numismatic works. The first, richly illustrated edition of the Dactyliotheca (documenting 400 engraved rings) was published for the first time in 1601, with numerous editions following throughout the seventeenth and into the eighteenth century. The author’s embeddedness in humanistic circles, notably in Leiden, can be fathomed by the names of the authors of the poems that introduce his book: they are Hugo de Groot (Grotius), Joseph Justus Scaliger, Janus Dousa and Daniel Heinsius. His Thesaurus numismatum Romanorum (illustrating 450 Roman coins) appeared posthumously, in 1609, with a preface by his homonymous son and with a dedication to King Henry IV of France, who may have been viewed as a potential client. The posthumous Paralipomena, in turn, is said to have been edited by the theologian and philosopher Petrus Bertius, who was a friend of Abraham van Goorle.

3.2. GORLAEUS’ YOUTH

These, then, were the prestigious and well-to-do circumstances into which David Gorlaeus was born. His parents having moved to Friesland in 1594 when he was three years old, David Gorlaeus grew up at his grandparent’s rebuilt mansion in the small village of Cornjum, which even today counts less than 500 inhabitants.

He is likely to have first attended Cornjum’s village school. That such a school existed, that it was supervised by the local parson and that David’s grandfather and father paid for its costs is evidenced by a number of documents from the first years of the seventeenth century. In the church of Cornjum, where David Gorlaeus is buried, we may in fact still see the testimonies of his parents’ role in the village: on the walls hang two wooden panels, dated 1602 and 1608 and carrying the coats of arms of David van Goorle, Sr., and Swob van Martena. The earlier of the two reproduce the Ten Commandments; the later the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer (see Figure 10).
We must assume that Gorlaeus subsequently attended Leeuwarden’s Latin school, which after the Reformation had been established in the Keimpmanastins, an aristocratic town residence that today counts as Leeuwarden’s oldest existing house. Given that in the summer of 1606, Gorlaeus enrolled at the University of Franeker, we may assume that he spent the years prior to that date at the Latin School, which lay at a distance of six kilometers – a brisk hour’s walk – from Cornjum’s Martenastate. Whether he moved in with his grandparents, who then resided in the Frisian capital, or walked up and down, is not known.

In the period that Gorlaeus presumably went to Latin school, its rector was a certain Johannes Fungerius (Fungeri or Funger, 1546-1612), who had previously studied medicine and law in Leuven and Cologne. A prolific author of didactic poems, he seems also to have been interested in pedagogy, as is testified by the title of his “Book on the Discipline and Right Education of Boys” of 1586. It should in this context be mentioned that in 1607, the year after Gorlaeus had left the Latin School, a certain Edo Neuhusius (Neuhaus or Nijenhuis, 1581-1638) was appointed as Fungerius’ successor as rector. Neuhusius was born in the nearby German town of Steinfurt, the famous Academy of which we will encounter repeatedly below. In fact, his uncle, who educated him after the death of his own
parents, was the well-known philosopher Otto Casmann, whose views Gorlaeus would have encountered in the lessons of his Franeker professor De Veno. Neuhu-
sius furthermore counted among his teachers at Steinfurt the famous philosopher
Clemens Timpler, whom we will also encounter below, as well as the theologian
Conrad Vorstius, to whom this book will dedicate quite a number of pages. The
relevance of this link between the Steinfurt Academy, Frisia and the Arminian fac-
tion of Dutch Protestantism will soon become evident.

When his famous grandfather passed away in 1605, David was 13 years old and
just about to enroll at Franeker University. When his apparently equally impres-
sive and belligerent grandmother died three years later, David was 16 years old
and about to obtain his first university degree. The circumstance that Gorlaeus
passed the years of his youth in the presence of his aristocratic and battle-proven
grandparents does not just add some touches of color to his biography, but also
sheds some light on David’s behavior. A number of Gorlaeus’ own character traits
might have been influenced by the unpliable and heroic character of the couple in
whose mansion he grew up and who must have had a hand in his education. Take,
for example, the stormy motto that Gorlaeus penned into a friend’s album in 1610:

Even if everyone holds the opposite view, the truth is to be defended; and one has
to judge one’s teacher in the same way as one judges one’s greatest enemy. Keep
this as your perpetual rule.

The air of self-confidence, rebellious spirit and love of independence that these
lines exude may owe much to the spirit of pride and defiance that must have
reigned at the mansion in Cornjum and the town house in Leeuwarden, whose
owners had accepted temporal exile, imprisonment and a lasting loss of property
and wealth in the Dutch wars of independence.

3.3. GORLAEUS AT FRANEKER UNIVERSITY

As we have just heard, Gorlaeus enrolled at Franeker University in 1606. He was
14 years old, a normal age in those days for beginning one’s Arts studies. The
Frisian university of Franeker (see Figure 11), which lies at a distance of 20 kilo-
meters from both Cornjum and Leeuwarden, was founded in 1585 as the Dutch
Republic’s second university, after Leiden (1575). A quite unique feature of the new
Frisian university was that, in contrast to other early modern Dutch universities,
its statues did not prescribe the teaching of Aristotelian philosophy. The only
non-negotiable requirement for its teachers was that they regard themselves as an
integral part of the Reformed Church and did not violate the doctrines of the Hei-
delberg Catechism. Indeed, Franeker’s professors of theology made sure everyone understood the link between theology and the other disciplines. In Frisia, the Reformation had gained the upper hand only recently, in 1580, in a very fast and violent operation, and the establishment of the university was intended to produce the new Protestant elite that the province needed. Philosophy, which was viewed as subordinate to theology, was expected to contribute to this enterprise, but divergent views quickly developed as to how this contribution could best be defined. Rivalling proposals as to how to reconcile philosophy with Protestant theology were offered, and not all of them relied on the Aristotelian corpus. While Lollius Adama (1544-1609), for example, still explicitly followed in the “footsteps of the Preceptor” (Aristotle), in 1610, the Ramist logician Frederic Stellingwerff (d. 1623) called Aristotle dismissively “that pope of nebulous opinions.”

It was at this nascent and still rather small institution that Gorlaeus enrolled in 1606, as the university’s 928th student, signing up for philosophy, the discipline in which he presumably took his Arts degree three or four years later.

In his work on the philosophical teaching at Franeker, Sybrand Galama has singled out two anti-Aristotelian figures whom he assumes to have been of particular influence on Gorlaeus’ intellectual development, namely the young law student
Frederic Stellingwerff (d. 1623) and the professor of philosophy Henricus de Veno (c. 1570-1613). Both figures have justly been associated with Gorlaeus in the subsequent scholarship, although partly for the wrong reasons. As we shall now see, these two men played very different roles in Gorlaeus' life. About Stellingwerff we may be brief, whereas De Veno will deserve a very detailed treatment.

Frederic Stellingwerff, who was a few years older than Gorlaeus, studied law. The two young men appear to have known each other even before Gorlaeus moved to Franeker, because they showed up together at the auction of Alardus Auletius' vast library in June 1606. Stellingwerff, who stayed at the house of Franeker's mayor, Hobbe Jelles Ansta, seems to have been well connected and may even have been appointed as mentor to the fourteen-year old Gorlaeus. In a rhetorically self-deprecating gesture, Gorlaeus signed off a touchingly adolescent panegyric on Stellingwerff, which was attached to a printed disputation the latter held in 1609, with the words: “David Gorlaeus of Utrecht, yours eternally, the one whom you have come to know so intimately, has hissed (stridebat) [this poem].” However, while Gorlaeus may have admired the older Stellingwerff, the latter seems to have relied on Gorlaeus, who was of a higher social standing, for moral and quite probably for financial support. In his logical disputations, which he published in 1610, Stellingwerff publicly acknowledges this debt:

Here, reader, you have my scholastic disputation which I elaborated about two years ago at the Frisian Academy of Franeker, when I gave private lessons, and which are now published at the instigation of the young David Gorlaeus, my intimate friend, who himself is setting in motion much bigger things than these.

The last words may well contain a reference to Gorlaeus’ own work-in-progress – probably the Idea physicae, or possibly already the Exercitationes – which he would have discussed with his friend Stellingwerff. Intellectually, however, the two young men went quite separate ways. While Gorlaeus tried to cast the foundations of philosophy anew by means of his ontology, Stellingwerff followed Ramus and chose dialectics. Although the above-named auction catalogue of 1606 evinces Gorlaeus’ initial interest in Ramus – he bought a number of Ramist treatises, including an expensive compendium containing a dialectica Rami and an Arithmetica Rami, as well as Johannes Piscator’s Animadversiones in dialecticam Petri Rami of 1580 – Gorlaeus’ extant treatises betray no discernible debt to either Ramus or Stellingwerff, nor do the latter’s later publications indicate any influence by Gorlaeus. What the two shared was at any rate a rebellious dissatisfaction with traditional school philosophy, from which they both attempted to break away in their different ways.
Gorlaeus’ intellectual debt to Henricus de Veno, professor in philosophy at Franeker, was undoubtedly more substantial. Very importantly, this influence did not just take place through classroom teaching. For, as the fascinating 1606 auction catalogue of the Franeker sale of the library of Auletius also reveals, Gorlaeus lodged at De Veno’s house. This sheds a very new and intriguing light on the student’s debt to his teacher. Given that De Veno hid behind his façade quite a few personal secrets and probably nurtured a number of intellectual heresies, which we shall now have to examine, we may presume that Gorlaeus obtained from him far more unorthodox ideas than can be documented on the basis of written records.

3.4. HENRICUS DE VENO’S SECRETS

The figure of De Veno (see Figure 12) has fallen into oblivion, even among historians of Dutch philosophy and science, because he did not publish any works under his own name. However, various European libraries contain published disputations that accompanied his philosophy courses, and from these disputations, De Veno emerges as a most unusual teacher. He may fairly be described as

**Fig. 12**: Henricus de Veno. Portrait by an anonymous painter, originally hung in the Senate Chamber of the Academy of Franeker. The portrait is analyzed in Ekkart, *Franeker professorenportretten*, 74-75. (Courtesy of Stichting Museum ’t Coopmanshûs, Franeker)
the least orthodox and most original Dutch professor of natural philosophy of the opening decade of the seventeenth century. His philosophical approach was theologically grounded and at the same time heavily indebted to the Italian naturalism of Girolamo Cardano (1501-1576) and Julius Caesar Scaliger (1484-1558). Although Gorlaeus was to outrival him in productivity, coherence and intellectual force, De Veno’s unorthodox views must be viewed as the necessary precondition for Gorlaeus' own metaphysics and physics.

While the philosophical views that De Veno taught during his lecture courses can in part be reconstructed on the basis of the extant disputations, his private opinions and convictions cannot. That is all the more deplorable as there exist forceful reasons for assuming that De Veno had, as it were, also an esoteric doctrine that differed from his exoteric, public teachings. These reasons emerge from his biography, which contained a dark secret that no one seems to have known at Franeker. One may assume that Gorlaeus, who lived in his house and will have overheard him converse at dinner, must have seen and absorbed more of his audacious ideas than other students.

Let us therefore first turn to the man himself. Henricus de Veno (who also spelled his name De Veen and Van der Veen) was born in the Frisian capital of Leeuwarden around 1574, as the second son of Jantje Gerrits Mamminga and of Laurens de Veno, secretary of Leeuwarden’s city council and town magistrate. His three brothers were to obtain influential positions in the army and trade courts, while his sister married Johannes Rhala, the administrator of religious properties in Frisia (ontvanger van de geestelijke goederen).43 Given these positions, we may presume that the De Veno family was acquainted with Gorlaeus’ grandfather, the politician and army leader Doeke van Martena, who after the destruction of his mansion in Cornjum in 1572 resided mostly in Leeuwarden.

Having also graduated from Leeuwarden’s Latin School, de Veno enrolled at the University of Franeker in 1591 as a student of “philosophy, languages, and theology.”44 Franeker University was at the time still an extremely small institution with an uncertain future. De Veno was in fact the university’s 130th student and only one out of 18 to enroll in the year 1591. Maybe for that reason, he soon thereafter moved on to Leiden University, where he was awarded a master’s degree in philosophy in August 1593, after successfully defending a number of intellectually inconspicuous logical and physical theses under professor Antonius Trutius, one of those early Dutch professors “whose names are not found in the history books.”45 In 1595, De Veno reappeared in Franeker, still as a simple magister, and in 1596 defended a set of theological propositions on usury there.

Instead of completing his theological studies, as one might have expected, De Veno next embarked on a most adventurous academic pilgrimage. Such tours usually took Frisian students to leading Protestant universities such as Heidelberg, Marburg, Basel or Geneva, where they would try to obtain their higher degrees.46
When De Veno returned to Frisia in early 1599, he claimed to have done just that: he declared himself to have become a triple doctor in law, medicine and philosophy, having also obtained much expertise in theology (albeit without possessing a doctorate in that discipline). He would henceforth sign with his three doctoral titles and did not prevent students from calling him “thrice great” for these qualifications.47

Yet behind this impressive façade lured an embarrassing and potentially dangerous secret. De Veno’s collection of titles was, at least in part, his own invention—and this invention served to cover up a dishonourable and dangerous fact: De Veno had gone to Rome, the capital of the confessional enemy, and had there been denounced, arrested and imprisoned by the Inquisition! The dates of his arrival in Rome and of his arrest are not known with precision, nor are the exact charges that were brought against him; his specific file (like hundreds of others) was lost in the period when, on Napoleon’s orders, the Archive of the Holy Office was shipped to Paris and only partially carried back to Rome after Napoleon’s defeat. However, what emerges from the extant acts of the Congregation of the Holy Office is that by 3 June 1597, De Veno was in prison after having been denounced by a Scotsman called Robert Brown.48 The Inquisition was supposed to have jurisdiction over all baptized Christians, including Protestants. As a Protestant, De Veno was considered a heretic, and heresy was viewed as a severe crime on a par with high treason (crimen laesae maiestatis).49 Whether he had committed any more active ‘crime’, such as trying to spread Protestant ideas or texts, is not known, but would not have been necessary for his arrest.

De Veno, when brought to trial in the autumn of the same year, did confess that he had embraced Protestant heresies until the age of eighteen, but at the same time insisted that he had relinquished his heretical views by the time he was twenty-three years of age.50 Although, as we have seen, De Veno had the year before still been studying theology at Franeker, he apparently tried to persuade the papal magistrates that between 1591, when he had first enrolled at Franeker, and 1596, when he left Friesland, he had gradually lost his Protestant faith, and that by the time he entered the Italian territory he had formally converted to Catholicism. It is not surprising that this account neither convinced the cardinals of the inquisitorial court, nor Robert Bellarmine, who was at the time a simple consultor working on this case. They regarded De Veno’s statement at least as a partial confession and decided to have priests from the Low Countries visit De Veno in prison to obtain the whole truth. In March 1598, they sent the well-known Flemish theologian and editor of patristic works Gerard Vossius (1540-1609) to De Veno’s cell so as to bring the latter to a full confession.51 It seems that these visits produced at least some of the desired results, because in June 1598, the cardinals reached the verdict that De Veno had to abjure as a “formal heretic,” which meant that his heresy had been proven. By abjuring, he returned officially to the Catholic faith.52
Usually, such a sentence would have resulted in a rather long prison term. It is therefore surprising to read in the acts that De Veno was released from prison within less than a week of this verdict. Although he was not yet allowed to leave Rome, he was granted an allowance for living expenses. Even more unexpectedly, in September 1598 he was given permission to return to his native Frisia. The documents suggest that the Inquisition’s lenience may be explained by De Veno’s young age, his education by Protestant parents and his foreign provenance, which were all regarded as mitigating circumstances. The Inquisition was incomparably more severe towards Catholics, and notably Catholic Italians. At the same time that De Veno stood trial, Tommaso Campanella (1568-1639) was jailed for several years, tortured, and eventually confined to Roman and Calabrian convents. Even more notorious is the trial of Giordano Bruno (1548-1600), who after a seven-year trial (1593-1600) and a fair amount of torture was burnt at the stake, having refused to abjure his heresies.

As for Giordano Bruno, it is for the intellectual historian suggestive in the extreme to discover that De Veno was confined to the same prison as this famous heretical atomist. There exist at least two separate lists of prisoners visited by the inquisitors that name Bruno and De Veno side by side (see Figure 13). As the number of prisoners was small – thirteen in one case and twenty in the other – it was inevitable for the two men to have encountered one another, although no such encounter is recorded in the extensive Bruno scholarship. But unless De Veno had denounced Bruno from within the prison for some heretical statements he had overheard (as other prisoners readily did), there was no reason for their possible conversations to result in any written record. With regard to Gorlaeus’ atomism, written down only a decade later, it is highly tempting to look for a possible Brunian influence: the idea that heterodox Roman prison conversations were repeated during equally heterodox dinner conversations at Franeker and sedimented in Gorlaeus’ daring treatises is highly alluring.

Unfortunately, however, in De Veno’s disputations defended at Franeker, there is no discernible trace of any sympathy for atomism. De Veno’s scepticism vis-à-vis Aristotelian natural philosophy or his emphasis on primary, divine causation are much more easily explained through his reading of Cardano, who is acknowledged as a source, than through Bruno. However, we do not know exactly what De Veno taught in his lecture course, and even less what he talked about at the dinner table with his precocious student.

But what had motivated De Veno to visit Rome in the first place? Had he really converted to Catholicism, as he affirmed in his court hearings? If not – as the course of his trial suggests – what attracted this Calvinist theology student to Rome? We do not know. But his case may be similar to that of the Dutch theologian Jacob Arminius (whom we will encounter repeatedly below), who as a student
had visited Padua and Rome. “In later years,” the historian of Arminianism Archibald Harrison reports, “it was asserted by his enemies that he kissed the pope’s toe in the eternal city, formed an acquaintance with Cardinal Bellarmine, came under the influence of the Jesuits and secretly renounced the reformed religion.”

What in the case of Arminius was mere calumny was however quite true for De Veno: he had met Bellarmine during his trial, and he had openly abjured his Protestant creed. It is obvious why he preferred to hide this ignominious episode from his fellow citizens back at Franeker.

At any rate, on 9 September 1598, De Veno left Rome. He did not tarry and speedily removed himself back to Protestant lands. Two months later, we find him enrolled at Basel University, where an entry in the Matricula of the Theological Faculty states (see Figure 14):

Henricus de Veno, Frisian. Declares that after becoming doctor of law in France, he furthermore wished to finish his study of theology. He was detained for an entire year in Rome in the prison of the Inquisition.\(^6\)

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\(^5\) What in the case of Arminius was mere calumny was however quite true for De Veno: he had met Bellarmine during his trial, and he had openly abjured his Protestant creed. It is obvious why he preferred to hide this ignominious episode from his fellow citizens back at Franeker.

\(^6\) Henricus de Veno, Frisian. Declares that after becoming doctor of law in France, he furthermore wished to finish his study of theology. He was detained for an entire year in Rome in the prison of the Inquisition.
De Veno’s frank admission that he had wished to pursue his theological studies at the center of Catholicism may be surprising. It might indicate, however, that to Basel’s university authorities, he suggested that he had gone there as a missionary for his own faith, and had ended as a martyr. Whatever the case may have been, what he admitted in Basel, he kept to himself back in Friesland. After all, studying in Rome was expressly forbidden to Dutch students by the government, and in fact no other Frisian Protestant is known to have tried to study theology there.\(^{57}\)

In late 1598, then, De Veno had still not completed his theological studies, but claimed to possess at least a French doctorate in law. When and where he obtained this degree is unclear. However, De Veno was from a family of lawyers, practiced law for two years after returning home, and identified himself as a “doctor of law” already to the Roman inquisitors. We must not dismiss the idea that he had done sufficient coursework for a doctorate in law, either between 1593 and 1596, when he resurfaced at Franeker or between his theological disputation at Franeker in 1596 and his arrest in Rome in 1597.

However, De Veno did not stay long in Switzerland, nor did he complete his theological education there. Five months later, in April 1599, we find him practicing as a lawyer (advocaat) in his hometown, the city of Leeuwarden. In 1601, he applied for the position of professor of theology at his alma mater, the University of Franeker, but given that he had no theological diploma to his name, the Senate preferred to elect the French theologian Franciscus Junius (du Jon, 1545-1602) in his stead.\(^{58}\) However, in October of the same year, De Veno was proposed for a new chair in ethics and physics. On 23 September 1602, his nomination was confirmed by the Gedeputeerde Staten and he began his career as Franeker’s Professor ethics et physices at a salary of 600 florins per year.\(^{59}\)

De Veno remained in his chair until his early death on 22 April 1613. As a teacher, he appears to have been quite popular among the students and was later fondly
recalled by some of them. However, historians of Franeker University record a grave incident that occurred in 1609, and of which Gorlaeus must have been a witness. After having assumed the rectorate of the university in June of that year, De Veno became involved in serious litigation with a number of his colleagues. The professors Marcus Lycklama, Timaeus Faber, Lollius Adama and his son Augustinus Adama, Adriaan Metius and Sixtus Arcerius collectively denounced him to the provincial government. He was subsequently suspended from his two charges as rector and professor, though at the same time the salaries of Augustinus Adama, Metius and Arcerius were lowered each by 100 florins as a punishment for their litigiousness.

It is hard to reconstruct what may have triggered this scandal. Vriemoet suggested that De Veno may have overestimated himself and his universal competence and that his arrogance may have angered his colleagues. Given his biography and partially false pretences, this sounds plausible enough. By contrast, that his Roman imprisonment and (temporal) conversion to Catholicism had been discovered is not plausible, because the resulting scandal would have left traces in the Frisian historiography. At the same time, the occasion for the clash must have been more concrete than mere ‘arrogance’. Vriemoet specifically surmises that De Veno’s former teacher, the Aristotelian Lollius Adama, may have taken exception at the novel Platonist theses taught by his pupil. Most subsequent historians, accepting this interpretation, speak of “battles between supporters and opponents of Aristotelianism.” But given that in 1609, De Veno had been teaching his peculiar philosophy for more than seven years, this seems an unlikely explanation.

It is much more probable to assume that De Veno’s removal had a theological component. A few months before the row broke out, a battle that had originated at Leiden over questions regarding predestination but had meanwhile assumed much more important and menacing dimensions, had reached Franeker. Below, we will hear a lot more about this battle between Arminians (also called ‘Remonstrants’ after 1610), on the one hand, and anti-Arminians (in early stages also called ‘Gomarists’ and after 1610 ‘anti-Remonstrants’), on the other. Suffice it here to take note of the fact that De Veno’s colleague, the theologian Sijbrand Lubbert (c. 1555-1625) had since 1604 been very much involved in it. “The north-easterly provinces of Friesland and Groningen were the stoutest supporters of High Calvinism in the Netherlands,” according to Harrison, who adds: “In this zealous allegiance the University of Franeker led the way, and the mouthpiece of the University was Sibrandus Lubbertus.” Always on the lookout for unorthodox views, Lubbert had earlier started a controversy with Johannes Drusius (1550-1616), professor of oriental languages, whom he accused of inclining to the Arian heresy. In 1615, he would also vie against a further colleague of his, the theologian Johannes Maccovius (1588-1644), over what became known as the causa particularis Frisica, a
controversy between supra- and infralapsarianism. As Van der Woude writes in his biography of Sijbrand Lubbert:

In all these years, he was engaged in fights on all sides. His campaign against Vorstius [Arminius’ successor at Leiden] had not yet finished when the conflict with Drusius started and he had to defend himself against Grotius. The battle raged inside the sphere of Dutch Protestantism, nay, within the very walls of the Franeker Academy.

Debates had flared up at Franeker violently during the first weeks of De Veno’s rectorate – when Gorlaeus was still his lodger – and reached its first peak around the time when he was forced to resign as rector and professor. In June of 1609, Simon Episcopius (1583-1644), Arminius’ talented student, who was later to become professor of theology at Leiden and one of the two main spokesmen for the Remonstrant party, showed up at Franeker to study with the professor of Hebrew, Drusius. Against all better advice, he had even allowed himself to get entangled in public disputations with Lubbert. It has in fact been stipulated that he did so on purpose, so as to weaken the reputation and influence of Franeker’s self-appointed watchdog of Calvinist orthodoxy. It has also been reported that Lubbert protested with the university curators about the Arminian faction within his own university. Although none of our sources mention De Veno in this context, the temporal coincidence is striking enough. Beginning in 1609, Lubbert, who had for years been styling himself as a kind of anti-Arminius, made sure that the orthodox view retained the upper hand. As the confrontation turned from one between single theologians into one involving theological as well as political schools of thought, it also became more menacing and the measures taken more drastic. A new peak was reached in the winter of 1610-1611, when several theology students who had previously studied at the Steinfurt Academy with Arminius’ appointed successor, Conrad Vorstius, had to flee from Franeker when the town and university authorities discovered that they were behind the publication of Fausto Sozzini’s highly heretical De officio hominis Christiani. The personal link between Gorlaeus and the students who published that explosive text will be analyzed below.

As for De Veno, there are various reasons that allow us to presume that in this ever growing doctrinal affair, he was leaning towards Arminius and his proposed successor, Vorstius. For example, his agreement with Jean Bodin’s call for a strong government watching over a state of confessional tolerance was shared by Vorstius, who in 1610 called upon the Dutch States-General to keep the churches under tight control while guaranteeing a libertas conscientiae, a nativa libertas in doctrinal interpretation and a prophetandi libertas in expounding such interpretations publicly. Quite generally, the liberties De Veno took in cooking up his own
philosophy, rather than following in Aristotle’s footsteps as most of his Dutch colleagues did, suggest precisely the kind of ‘latitudinarian’ and non-dogmatic attitude that Lubbert perceived as a public danger. Moreover, like other Arminians, he may even have hoped for an eventual reconciliation of the divided Christian confessions – a hope that may possibly explain his imprudent visit to Rome a decade earlier.

Arminius’ friend, the eminent theologian Johannes Wtenbogaert, wrote as early as 1606 that doctrinal dissent was not dangerous for the Church, but might, if left to itself, eventually result in a greater consensus.71 A perusal of De Veno’s metaphysical, physical and political convictions, at least in so far as they have been preserved in his published disputations, would suggest that this Franeker professor might also have subscribed to this view. His colleague Lubbert, in keeping with his convictions, of course reacted negatively to all calls for greater liberty in theological matters, arguing that this implied opening the doors to heresy.72

In sum, then, once the Arminian issue had exploded at Franeker, it seems not implausible to assume that given his own theological and philosophical proclivities, De Veno did not take the steps and measures that Lubbert and the university’s curators expected of him as the university’s rector, or possibly even stepped beyond his duties in siding with Episcopius. Although Lubbert does not figure on the list of professors who denounced him, the temporal coincidence with the Episcopius incident is such that it is counterintuitive to assume that it played no role in his suspension as rector and professor.

Pointing to Frederic Stellingwerff’s hasty publication of his Ramist dialectics in 1610, Klaas van Berkel has wondered whether this young philosopher might have hoped to replace De Veno.73 If that was indeed Stellingwerff’s hope, he must have been sorely deluded. De Veno was reinstated in his old chair on 28 January 1611, at the lower salary of 500 florins, on condition that he would from now on respect the laws of the university, “abstain from subtle parerga and quaestiones, and also from defamatory acts and words” and, finally, that he would stop his extracurricular contact with students, who seem to have sided with him during the clash with his colleagues.74 It is quite possible to interpret these conditions for readmission as aiming at De Veno’s theological extrapolations from strictly philosophical matters. Now, if there was anyone who had “extracurricular contact” with De Veno, it was Gorlaeus, who lodged in his house!

It is a shame that we do not have any printed disputations held under De Veno from this turbulent period. We are therefore in the dark with respect to the contents and possible evolution of his philosophical, theological and political views in the years in which Gorlaeus studied with him. What we do know is that after his reinstatement, De Veno taught for two more years. He died prematurely on 22 April 1613, at roughly forty years of age.
As most of De Veno’s extant disputationes are kept in libraries outside the Netherlands, historians of Dutch philosophy or of Franeker University have not been able to appreciate the unusual nature of his teaching, notably in the domain of natural philosophy. Today, we know of eleven disputationes defended for the sake of exercise (exercitii gratia), which were associated with De Veno’s lecture courses and therefore written by himself. Of these, nine treat topics in physics, one in metaphysics and one in politics. Furthermore, there is one set of theses pro gradu, for obtaining a master’s degree, over which De Veno presided and whose contents he will presumably not have (entirely) written by himself. Finally, we have a curious published list of “errors and contradictions” that De Veno claimed to have spotted in Justus Lipsius’ best-selling political treatise, the Politica of 1589, whose Dutch translation was in 1590 published nowhere else than at Franeker. At the end of this Syllabus of Errors and Contradictions, which a handwritten note on the only extant copy from the New York Public Library dates to 1604, De Veno – who here identifies himself as “professor of politics” – offered to work his arguments into a full treatise if the Frisian authorities sponsored his proposals. Evidently, they did not, for nothing is known of such a book.

When we put all these texts next to each other, it becomes obvious that De Veno was not at all the Platonist that earlier historians have believed him to be. Rather, his philosophy may be characterized as an attempt to combine an Italian approach to natural philosophy with the exigencies of Protestant theology and metaphysics. With this combination, he is both the direct precursor of, and the major influence on, his student Gorlaeus.

The importance attached to theology is clearly formulated in De Veno’s premise that there can exist only one single truth, which has been revealed in the Sacred Scriptures. Given the uniqueness and unity of truth, it is illegitimate, so he argues, to claim that Aristotle was right philosophically but wrong theologically. By taking this view, De Veno followed in the footsteps of a number of contemporary German Protestant philosophers whom he frequently cites, such as Otto Casmann (1562-1607), Rudolf Goclenius (1547-1628) and Nicolaus Taurellus (1547-1606). These authors had recently staged a battle against the double-truth doctrine of colleagues they accused of following Averroes and according to whom certain statements could be philosophically true while being theologically false. In order to remove the tension between philosophy and theology, these German philosophers had tried, each in his own way, to align the two disciplines and had thoroughly reformulated metaphysics, logic and natural philosophy in the process. That their reformed philosophies contained notions and principles that violated Aristotle’s teaching seemed acceptable: they felt that, as a pagan author, Aristotle had clearly
been ignorant of the truths of revelation. Quite evidently, De Veno attempted to
insert his own teaching efforts into this larger enterprise. In fact, like the German
authors he admired, he borrowed a whole series of non-Aristotelian doctrines from
Italian natural philosophers, notably from Girolamo Cardano and Julius Caesar
Scaliger, as well as from chemical authors of the Paracelsian tradition.

It is characteristic of this intellectual setting that the first disputation of De
Veno’s physics course opens with the issue of how to reconcile the conflicting au-
thorities of Holy Scripture and philosophy. We are told that since the day in which
Adam and Eve bit into the forbidden apple, our cognitive faculties have been
hampered and our knowledge has been insecure – a conviction that, as we have
seen, was shared by Gorlaeus.\(^\text{78}\) Whoever wants to overcome these shortcomings
is invited to turn to biblical revelation, to experience and observation, as well as to
reason. In this enterprise, ‘physics’ (a term that, we recall, was at the time equiv-
alent to ‘natural philosophy’), is of great assistance. Although De Veno’s definition
of physics is aligned with contemporary textbooks (“physics is the contemplative
science of natural bodies, insofar as they are natural”), the theological and medical
uses to which he directs this discipline make it assume new and often decidedly
anti-Aristotelian overtones.\(^\text{79}\) As for theology, De Veno insists that “the sacrosanct
word of God” must constitute the textual starting-point for the natural philoso-
pher, as “Aristotle’s physics is imperfect.”\(^\text{80}\) The fact that De Veno lists Adam,
Noah, Solomon and other Old Testament figures among the “authors of physics”
reveals that he, like other Protestant authors, believed in the existence of a “Mo-
saic physics” – a physics, in other words, that was contained, in part implicitly, in
the account offered in Genesis of the creation of the universe. In this respect, it is
revealing that he refers to the prolegomenon of Otto Casmann’s recent Cosmopoeia
Christiana (1598), where it is explained why “Aristotle must cede to Moses.”\(^\text{81}\)

In the second disputation, “On the principles and causes of natural things,”
De Veno defines three constitutive principles of things natural. These are not the
Aristotelian principles of matter, form and privation, as could have been expected
from an Aristotelian natural philosopher, but instead matter, form and spirit. Fol-
lowing Cardano, De Veno defines spirit, which thus replaces privation, as the ef-
ficient cause that brings about the merger of matter and form into a substance, and
which furthermore inheres in the latter.\(^\text{82}\) Nor is matter pure potentiality, as De
Veno’s Aristotelian colleagues continued to maintain, because it possesses its own
body, “albeit a most imperfect one.” This bodily nature explains why matter does
not desire a form (“for it desires nothing of that, which it has”).\(^\text{83}\)

The third disputation, which deals with the “first affections of body” – that
is, with motion, rest and time – is no longer extant, but we do possess the fourth
disputation De infinito et loco. It is a disputation in which the influence of Pro-
estant theological needs on the development of natural philosophy is particularly
evident. In this disputation, we encounter Otto Casmann once more, whom De Veno follows in denying that any physical object can be infinite in the sense of lacking either limits or a middle, as God is the only actual infinite. As far as place (locus) is concerned, only created beings (entia) have a place, whereas God, whose essence is infinite, cannot be placed. At this point in his exposition, De Veno turns to a cluster of concepts that was of particular importance to the thorny issue of the Eucharist: can a body – such as the bread and wine of the Last Supper – transubstantiate into blood and wine, while retaining its old appearance and attributes, as the Catholics and Lutherans maintained (though offering different explanations for this process), or does the Eucharist not involve any such transformation, as Calvinists and Zwinglians protested (although once more for different reasons)?

De Veno also caters to Calvinist needs when he addresses the issue of the relation of body, place and quantity. He defines “place” according to the “most learned and subtle Scaliger” as the “space of the thing or body that is placed, and which is contained inside of the surrounding body.” Like Gorlaeus after him, De Veno thus accepts Scaliger’s consequential rejection of Aristotle’s concept of “place” (as a kind of skin that envelopes the object) and accepts the alternative proposal of defining the place of a body as the quantity of general “space” that is occupied by that body. Invoking the arguments of Casmann and of the famous Paduan philosopher Jacopo Zabarella (1533-1589), De Veno furthermore argues that the accident of “quantity” cannot be separated from the body itself. From this he concludes, like many Calvinists at the time, that the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation cannot be true.

With the fifth disputation, De mundo in genere, we leave the realm of the “affections” and turn to the physical bodies themselves. The disputation begins by defining the world (mundus) as a body that contains heaven and earth and all that is in them. There is no world soul, as the Platonists believe, as the world “is governed by God’s most noble spirit.” Very much like other contemporary Protestant thinkers, and particularly Calvinists, De Veno attributes much that used to be relegated to secondary causes directly to God’s agency. The disputation is, for the rest, rather inconspicuous. However retrograde it may seem to us, there is nothing unusual about either his explicit rejection of Copernicus’ heliocentric model or the insistence, against Aristotle, that the world is not eternal, but was created 5561 years before the disputation took place, and hence in 3957 BC.

Among the extant physics disputations, the eighth comes next, and it addresses the elements. Elements are defined, quite traditionally, as “corporeal essences, individuated according to species, subject to change, out of which all mixts are constituted and into which they are resolved.” This definition shows not the least trace of the atomism that would constitute the core of Gorlaeus’ metaphys-
ics and physics. Indeed, for De Veno, elements remain “the first bodies that can be generated and corrupted,” just as they had been for Aristotle, which means that they can be transformed into one another and dissolve into higher forms. A clear departure from Aristotle is, by contrast, constituted by the doctrine that there are not four, but only three – or possibly just two – elements. On this issue, we find once more strong doctrinal overlaps with Gorlaeus. Like his student, De Veno excludes fire from the list of elements. In his eyes, it is a mere “meteoron” – a phenomenon occurring in the stratum of air. The three remaining elements are defined by their respective degrees of warmth (warm, temperate, cold), which are their primary affections, and by three degrees of humidity (wet, humid, dry), which are described as their secondary, passive activities. These three elements are, however, not on a par, because unlike earth and water, air never enters into the composition of natural bodies but fills all empty spaces in the universe and functions as a carrier of heavenly heat. This doctrine, as we have seen, returns in identical form in Gorlaeus. In all bodies, De Veno continues, it is the element of earth that provides the shape of the substance, contains the heavenly “signature” and nurtures the “seeds.”

Similar, though not identical, doctrines are broached in an unnumbered disputation “About air” (De aëre) of the same year. This time, air is clearly excluded from the list of elements, though it is defined as a “simple body.” The reason De Veno offers for this elimination is that in the beginning, God created heaven and earth without needing air as an original ingredient. After considering briefly the views of Scaliger, Goclenius, Taurellus, Justus Lipsius and Lambert Daneau (Daneus) on the qualities of air, De Veno concludes that no substantial transmutation of air into either fire or earth is possible. There can be no doubt that this set of theses, which De Veno himself calls “a disputation against the views of many Aristotelians,” is directly inspired by the writings of Girolamo Cardano. In his De subtilitate (1550), Cardano had developed a theory that had first been adumbrated in Aristotle’s Meteorology, book IV, where it is proposed that natural substances are made up exclusively of earth (the principle of dryness) and water (the principle of wetness), which mixed under the influence of celestial heat. “All recognizable substances in our world contain these two elements,” Aristotle says there, “and are to be assigned to one or the other according to the proportion in which they contain earth or water.

From the late fifteenth century onward, the two-element theory had attracted the attention of Paduan physicians and philosophers, and commentaries on Meteorology IV had begun to proliferate. Girolamo Cardano, a Padua-trained philosopher-physician, developed the two-element theory into a veritable cosmology. Like De Veno after him, he defined elements as those bodies that could enter into mixtures, so as to form physical bodies. From the traditional list of the four ele-

DAVID GORLÆUS (1591-1612)
ments, he excluded fire, which according to him was not a substance at all, and air, which he thought was clearly a substance, but not one that could mix with others. The function of air, he maintained, was that of carrying celestial heat down to the terrestrial realm. Once again, as we have seen in our previous chapter, this is also Gorlaeus’ view, and we are now in a position to identify its proximate as well as its remote source.

That De Veno was acquainted with Cardano’s physics is evident, for he mentions him with approval in another disputation in which the student is asked to defend the following thesis: “Is there any elementary fire existing underneath the lunar sphere? We deny it with Cardano.” In yet another disputation, De Veno also denied that book IV of Aristotle’s Meteorology was correctly named and argued that it dealt not with meteorological phenomena at all but with perfectly homogeneous mixtures. In so doing, he sided with Alexander of Aphrodisias (2nd c. AD), who had stated that Meteorology IV was in truth a treatise on perfect mixtures, and with Italian authors such as Agostino Nifo (1473-1538) and Pietro Pomponazzi (1462-1525), who named this Aristotelian work liber de mixtis and liber de mixtione, respectively.

This two-element theory constitutes an important bridge to early modern atomism, because if earth is identified with the principle of dryness and water with the principle of wetness, it becomes much more difficult to maintain the traditional theory according to which all elements can be transformed into one another. We can see in Cardano and even more clearly in Scaliger how natural the next step was, namely of thinking of these two material principles in terms of unchanging particles and of imagining their union as the special coming together of minute pieces of matter.

The eminent historian of atomism Kurd Lasswitz ended his commentary on Gorlaeus’ two-element theory with the words: “It would seem as if Gorlaeus had been the first who denied the transmutation of water into earth.” But as we have just seen, this doctrine had first been developed by Gorlaeus’ teacher De Veno, who based himself on a north-Italian two-element theory, which in turn was due to a re-interpretation of Aristotle’s Meteorology IV.

Given the intimate link between the redefinition of the elements and the theory of mixture, it is a fortunate coincidence that the penultimate extant disputation of De Veno’s physics course treats “Of the generation and corruption of mixtures.” Our Franeker philosopher defines ‘mixture’ as “the mutation of the elements by the spirit for the sake of the production of a mixed body.” This definition, which had been adumbrated in the second disputation, is once again not Aristotle’s, but Cardano’s. The same is true of the view that this ‘spirit’ – which in the disputation De mundo in genere had been identified with “God’s most noble spirit […] governing” the world – is the efficient cause of mixtures, while the instrumental
cause is “heavenly heat.” De Veno further defends the view that the quality of cold is never responsible for mixtures, but has limited agency inasmuch as it moderates heat through a reaction (reactione). Here, he relies once more on Cardano’s two-element theory, for he writes that the material of all mixtures is “the elements insofar as they are humid and dry,” that is, consist of water and earth, “for these are the accidents that necessarily accompany matter.” Unlike his pupil Gorlaeus, who would defend the view that mixtures are merely accidental conglomerates of indivisible atomic units and thus entia per accidens, De Veno argues in a more traditional manner that in a mixture, new forms arise “out of the potency of matter.” Still, his position is not strictly Peripatetic, as he rejects both Aristotle’s and Averroes’ idea that the forms (that is, the specific qualities) of the elements are strengthened or weakened in mixtures, as “simply false.” What happens instead is that the “union of the primary qualities, being the product of their mutual action and reaction,” produces a specific temperament (temperamentum) – an Aristotelico-Galenic term, as we have seen, which Gorlaeus would also employ. As far as corruption is concerned, De Veno offers a technical explanation that is developed in response to the French physician Jean Fernel’s (1497-1558) theory of putrefaction. Natural corruption is the ‘resolution’ of the mixture into its original elements. It is caused by the influence of ambient heat, which increases the natural heat of the mixture, opens up its outer parts and thereby leads to the escape of the enclosed humidity. In the case of organic beings, this also leads to the loss of vital heat. What is left behind quickly grows cold and soft – and dies.

The last extant disputation of the physics course treats of “the rational soul and its faculties.” Traditionally, as we have seen in the context of Gorlaeus’ two treatises, the various souls – the vegetative soul shared by all living beings, including plants; the sentient soul, shared by all animals; and the uniquely human rational soul – constituted the concluding and crowning topic of natural philosophy. De Veno states as a premise that on this question, all ancient philosophers had been mistaken. He prefers to rely on Christian authors, notably on Thomas Aquinas, whom he quotes frequently, and on Thomists such as Crisostomo Javelli (c. 1470-1538), Thomas Bricot (d. 1516) and Arcangelo Mercenario (d. 1585). He is particularly interested in what might be called the soul’s causal definition. As for the efficient cause, De Veno argues that all Greek philosophers had failed to understand that God was the immediate manufacturer of all souls. In the particular case of the human rational soul, it has neither a material nor a formal cause; because it is itself the substantial form that defines ‘man’ (“the form that informs ‘man’ is the substantial form of man”). As for its final cause, he explains that it lies in “all the operations of the soul.” Following in the footsteps of the Renaissance philosopher and logician Thomas Bricot, De Veno argues that the soul has no material or composite aspect, but is a formal being (ens) that is incorporeal and yet subsisting.
Unlike some contemporaries, he rejects the view that in humans, the three above-mention types of soul – vegetative, sentient and rational or intellective – exist as independent entities. Instead, he subscribes to what is called the ‘unicist’ account when he writes that there exists only one, rational, soul that possesses a threefold function. This one and only human soul can be studied either on its own – as an immortal and self-sustaining immaterial entity – or in conjunction with the body, of which it is the “first act” and the “informing form”; only the second aspect belongs to natural philosophy, whereas the first is treated in metaphysics and theology.

Of those disputation that are unrelated to De Veno’s physics course, one consists of a set of seventeen “famous questions” that a candidate for the masters title in philosophy disputed under De Veno’s presidency in 1605 and thus a year before Gorlaeus’ enrollment at Franeker. Although these questions and the answers given to them are few in number and extremely short, they provide a concise overview of De Veno’s principal philosophical concerns. The candidate, who begins with ethics, first declares himself to be closer to Stoic and Platonist positions than to Aristotle’s, not least because the former are more compatible with Holy Scripture. Next, he turns to metaphysics, where he raises a crucial question that takes us to the core of the philosophy of his student Gorlaeus and to the point of the latter’s disagreement with Stellingwerff: “Is the subject of metaphysics the intelligible, inasmuch as it is intelligible, or instead being [ens] insomuch as it is being [ens]?"

To this question, which in some way summarizes the two intellectual paths one could choose at Franeker, if one wished to cast a new basis for philosophy, his answer is as clear as it is important in our present context: “The first position has been defended by some neoterics, but we defend the latter thesis against them.” The ‘neoterics’ alluded to are obviously the Ramists, who were well represented at Franeker, notably in the person of De Veno’s own teacher, Lollius Adama. In defending an ontological definition of metaphysics, De Veno showed his preference for an approach to metaphysics that was at the time developing in Protestant Germany, and to which his own student Gorlaeus was to make a noteworthy and innovative contribution.

De Veno’s intellectual preference is evident also in the subsequent question, which attacks Heizo Buscher (1564-1598), a philosopher who belonged to the so-called Philippo-Ramist current. Against Buscher, De Veno’s candidate affirms that no essential properties can be removed from a body without a concomitant loss of its essence. With this issue, he enters anew the thicket of the Eucharistic controversies, in which the possibility of separating a given substance – bread or Christ’s body, respectively – from its properties was the central issue. In fact, De Veno’s master candidate rebuts a range of Lutheran and Catholic authors. Among the
latter, we find Cardinal Bellarmine, who is accused of having argued wrongly that a body could be in several places at once without filling space. To encounter this name in a Franeker disputation carried out under De Veno is of course quite striking: nothing about the standard rebuttal of the Cardinal’s much cited anti-Protestant work, the *Disputationes de controversiis Christianae fidei adversus hujus temporis haereticos* (which had come out in various instalments from 1581 onwards), could have made the audience suspect that De Veno was personally acquainted with this famous inquisitor, whom he had faced as the *consultor* of the inquisitorial court during his Roman trial.

Moving on to physics, the candidate asserts that prime matter is an incorruptible body and, once again, that there exists no elementary fire under the moon. Tycho Brahe – with whom we have already learned that De Veno’s colleague, the mathematician Adriaan Metius, had worked in 1594 – is invoked against Aristotle’s view that comets are phenomena generated from and in air. In the remaining *quaestiones* of the disputation, finally, the candidate postulates that Aristotle had also been wrong about creation, about the highest good, about time and about the matter of the heavens, which is identical to the matter of the sublunar sphere. This last thesis is of course revealing, as it documents the fact that De Veno anticipated Gorlaeus’ much-debated rejection of the difference between sublunary and supralunary elements.

There are, finally, two extant disputations that are entirely unrelated to natural philosophy. The first deals with a subject belonging to public law. Given that in the Aristotelian university tradition, public law was understood as a political topic that belonged to the realm of practical philosophy, it was natural that De Veno would also have been expected to address it. The *Dissertatio politica de magistratu* of 1606 deals with the powers and functions of magistrates. It asks, among other things, about the personal qualities required of magistrates and their powers in the domains of war, politics and religion. De Veno relies heavily on Jean Bodin (1530-1596), the so-called father of state sovereignty. He defends a type of measured absolutism, stating that the prince stands above the people, but the law above the prince. However, the prince is not bound by any specific law (which he can change) but only by natural law. His powers are derived directly from God who is the *causa efficiens prima*, in contrast to the society of men, which represents only the *causa efficiens secunda* – an idea that we also find in Bodin. Particularly important is De Veno’s affirmation that the magistrates, not the religious authorities, should watch over religious practise and doctrine. The crucial point is that with this view, as we have adumbrated above, De Veno would have fallen within the Arminian camp, which had only the year before began to insist – much to the displeasure of the orthodox anti-Arminian camp – that the punishment of sins, the settling of doctrinal disputes and the protection of a certain liberty of preach-
ing and biblical interpretation was the privilege of the civil authorities, not of ecclesiastical ones.\(^{134}\)

The last of the extant disputations defended under De Veno is entitled *De signo et signato*. Its topic, the relation between “sign and signified,” is defined in the opening thesis as a subject matter that belongs exclusively to metaphysics, although many of the theses discuss questions that belong to logic. One of the key works plundered for arguments is in fact the *Problemata logica* of the Marburg philosopher Rudolph Goclenius (1547-1628). But since Peter Lombard’s twelfth-century *Sentence Commentaries*, whose fourth book constitutes the *locus classicus* for this question, the relation between sign and signified had been also a theological issue. In De Veno’s disputation too, these implications quickly come to the fore: “All the Lutherans err gravely when they claim that the sign is always at the same place as the signified.”\(^{135}\) The central issue at stake is, as in so many other disputations of this period, the interpretation of the Eucharist, or, more precisely, the presence of the body and blood of Christ in the consecrated bread and wine, which the Catholics and the Lutherans affirm, albeit for different reasons, and the Calvinist Protestants deny. For them, the real presence of Christ is not in the consecrated bread and wine, but occurs in the spirit of the believer during the act of consumption. To prove the local separation of sign and signified is thus a central concern for Calvinist theologians and philosophers alike. Typically, the defendant in the disputation insists that for a concept to capture the *ens* that is signified by it, it must be spatially separated from it. The ubiquitarians (who maintain that the risen Christ is ubiquitous in the same way as God the Father and can thus be equally present at all altars in the world simultaneously) therefore err in assuming that in the Eucharist there exists a double sign, namely the external sign of wine and bread, and the inner sign of the body and blood of Christ. De Veno’s student is asked to insist, in this disputation, that the latter are merely the signified, but that the signified can never be internal to the sign.\(^{136}\)

This disputation demonstrates exceptionally well how key theological concerns dictated the alignment of metaphysics, logic and physics with confessional doctrines. Unusual about this disputation is that its theses were not De Veno’s – as would have been the case with all other disputations he chaired – but had been written by the well-known German philosopher Clemens Timpler, as the postscript declares.\(^{137}\) In its dedication, the defendant, a certain Augustinus Arnoldi, identifies himself as a student from a prestigious institution we encountered before: the Steinfurt Academy (officially called the Gymnasium Illustre Arnoldinum), which lay in a town close to the Dutch border. Arnoldi mentions among his teachers not only the philosopher Timpler, but also the liberal but controversial theologian Conrad Vorstius (1569-1622), about whom we will hear more in the pages to come.\(^{138}\)
This Steinfurt link is noteworthy for several reasons. Between its foundation in 1588 and the establishment of the University of Groningen (1614) and the Illustre School at Deventer (1630), both of which were nearby, Steinfurt’s Gymnasium Illustre was one of the foremost institutions to provide the nascent Dutch Republic with Calvinist ministers. In those decades, many students from the eastern Dutch provinces went to Steinfurt to get at least a part of their education from its distinguished faculty. Otto Casmann, whose name we have already repeatedly encountered in De Veno’s disputations, taught at Steinfurt between 1589 and 1595, and Clemens Timpler, his successor, lectured there from 1595 to 1624. Their combination of a Ramist methodology with a reformed Aristotelian metaphysics and physics influenced the teaching at Franeker in numerous ways.

We have also already heard that the rector of Leeuwarden’s Latin School since 1607, Edo Neuhusius, who was also Otto Casmann’s nephew, was a Steinfurt alumnus.

However, in the second half of the year 1610, this serene relation of mutual benefit turned sour. The reason for this sudden change was the nomination of Steinfurt’s professor of theology, Conrad Vorstius (whom we have just encountered in the dedication of De Veno’s student Arnoldi), as the successor of the recently deceased Jacob Arminius at Leiden University. This appointment exacerbated the battle between Remonstrants (Arminians) and contra-Remonstrants (anti-Arminians), which culminated in 1618-1619, when the Synod of Dort condemned the Remonstrants and banned Vorstius from Dutch soil. The episode and its eventual outcome, to which we will have to return below, left deep traces in the evolution of Dutch Calvinism and at the same time alienated Steinfurt and the Dutch academic establishment from one another.

We heard earlier that the Arminian issue erupted violently at Franeker in the year of De Veno’s rectorate, in 1609, and have suggested that his involvement in it may have been the cause of his temporal removal from both the rectorate and his professorial chair. Seen in this perspective, one is left wondering whether the appearance, in 1604, of a Steinfurt student of Timpler and Vorstius who disputed under De Veno on matters carrying heavy theological implications points to a more profound institutional and an intellectual bond between De Veno and the Steinfurt academics. Given the scarcity of the printed material of that period, we cannot decide this issue. However, we have seen that De Veno cites Otto Casmann and Clemens Timpler frequently and with approval in his disputations. We have also seen that De Veno seemed to share Vorstius’ political preference for a government that kept the churches as well as dogmatic disputes under their control.

In sum, then, what must we think of Gorlaeus’ teacher Henricus de Veno? Irrespective of the secretive aspects of his biography, it appears from the extant disputations that De Veno’s teaching presented a noteworthy combination of recently developed philosophical positions. We have seen that, contrary to some of his
colleagues at Franeker, he was not interested in Ramism but was instead attracted by the theologically motivated ontological concerns of such German philosophers as Goclenius, Taurellus and later Casmann. Furthermore, he was the only Dutch professor whose teaching reflected the cosmology and theory of matter of Girolamo Cardano and, to a lesser extent, of Julius Caesar Scaliger. Thanks to his colleague Adriaan Metius, he was furthermore aware of Tycho Brahe’s observations of comets and used them to deny the immutability of the celestial spheres and the existence of a non-elemental ether. While it would, a few decades later, no longer be uncommon for teachers of natural philosophy to mention the novel results of the empirical disciplines, De Veno seems to me to have been the only Dutch philosopher to have done so in the opening years of the seventeenth century.

3.6. GORLÆUS’ DEBT TO DE VENO, CARDANO AND SCALIGER

There is undeniably a fresh air of modernity about De Veno’s disputations, whose printed versions date to the years 1603 to 1606, the latter being also the year in which Gorlaeus enrolled at Franeker. They combine an ‘Italian’ approach to natural philosophy with the most up-to-date Protestant doctrines on metaphysics and physics. True to his motto, “I have no authorities” (authoritates non habeo), De Veno followed, besides Aristotle, a variety of theological, Platonist, Stoic, medical and naturalist authors, using as his main criterion the agreement of their respective views with Holy Scripture, reason and experience (in this precise order).¹⁴²

This link between theology, metaphysics and physics is comparable to what we have found in Gorlaeus’ writings, the main difference being that De Veno’s disputationes allow us to recognize more directly the theological motifs and sources behind his philosophical choices, as well as the authors and books that nurtured them. By contrast, Gorlaeus almost never mentions his sources (a fact which explains how he could have been mistaken for an experimental scientist).

As for the theological concerns, they are particularly evident in the Disputatio metaphysica defended in 1604 under De Veno by Augustinus Arnoldi, the above-mentioned Steinfurt student whom Clemens Timpler had sent over to Franeker.¹⁴³ We recall that this “metaphysical disputation” addresses the issue of the physics of the Eucharist, which was one of the key levers by which confessional reasons brought about doctrinal adjustments in metaphysics and physics at Protestant universities.¹⁴⁴ How such an adjustment worked can be observed in the disputation De infinito et loco, in which De Veno’s preference for a general space (spatium) over a localized place (locus) is overtly linked to the Calvinist interpretation of the Eucharist and hence to the need to rebut both the Catholic doctrine of transubstanti-
ation and the Lutheran doctrine of ubiquity. More precisely, quoting a number of Protestant philosophers, including Goclenius, Taurellus and Casmann, De Veno tries to demonstrate that it is impossible for a body to be separated from its place (*locus*), because the *locus*, being a quantity, is necessarily tied to the body. In this instance, as in others, De Veno (like Gorlaeus after him) tried to propagate an ontology that substituted accidents by essential attributes. Moreover, if all things exist in a specific place (because place, *qua* quantity, is tied to them), it follows that prime matter must be considered “a substance, a body, and incorruptible.” What is adumbrated here was to become much more explicit in Gorlaeus: there is no space for potentialities in this world; whatever is, is fully and actually so, and matter is represented by the atoms that make it up, which are incorruptible units.

Importantly, this tight link between physics, metaphysics and theology explains why De Veno and his student Gorlaeus could share the conviction that the study of natural philosophy was capable of improving the situation of our fallen souls: “thanks to the knowledge of physics, we may arrive at the knowledge of God and his power.” Importantly, the physics that De Veno has in mind is not Aristotle’s, which is “not worthy of a Christian, nor of a philosopher,” but one that is in accordance with the “sacrosanct word of God,” on the one hand, and with observation, on the other. It is the “sacrosanct word,” for example, that demonstrates why Aristotle’s axiom that *ex nihilo nihil fit* is wrong. Here, we have one more of the sources of Gorlaeus’ drawn-out attack on this axiom.

But De Veno introduced Gorlaeus not only to the world of Protestant metaphysics and to ontology in particular, but also to a view of natural philosophy that was directly inspired by Cardano’s *De subtilitate* (1550) and somewhat less by Scaliger’s *Exercitationes exotericae de subtilitate* (1557). By the early seventeenth-century, both works were well known and repeatedly reprinted north of the Alps; and yet, when we compare De Veno’s views on matter theory with those of his Dutch contemporaries, we find that he is the only philosopher who dismisses Aristotle’s physics in favor of Cardano’s.

In chapter 2, we analyzed Gorlaeus’ two-element theory. In the present chapter, we have seen that he received it from De Veno, who in turn had taken it from Cardano. The latter’s *De subtilitate* develops an idea that had first been adumbrated in the fourth book of Aristotle’s *Meteorology* and had, from the late fifteenth century onwards, attracted the attention of Paduan physicians and philosophers. The Italian philosopher Francesco Piccolomini summarized this view as follows: “Cardano affirms in his Book on mixture that mixts do not consist of fire, nor of water, but exclusively of earth, water and heavenly heat.” This is essentially the elemental theory that Gorlaeus was to adopt and merge with his own atomism. Whether he needed to read Cardano or learned these positions directly from De Veno, who repeatedly quoted Cardano with approval, cannot be decided on the basis of the
texts we have. Either way, De Veno’s disputations help us understand the appeal that this theory seems to have had for the two men: the definition of mixture as the “mutation of the elements by the spirit for the sake of the production of a mixed body” allowed one, in their eyes, to posit “God’s most noble spirit” as the efficient cause of mixtures and “heavenly heat” as its instrumental cause.\(^{153}\)

Despite his acceptance of Cardano’s and De Veno’s theory of elements and mixtures, Gorlaeus modified it considerably by joining it to his own atomist ontology. Neither Cardano nor De Veno had postulated the existence of atoms. The latter maintained that elements are “the first generable and corruptible bodies,” attacked those who believed that the “forms of the elements remain intact in the mixt” and taught that the *temperamentum* was merely the accident of a substantial *forma mixti*:\(^{154}\) Although Gorlaeus, too, believed in the existence of such a common ‘temperament’, in his eyes, the elements did remain intact in the mixts, namely as atoms; nor was the temperament an accident of a new substantial form:

Bodies that are mixed out of earth and water have no essence that is distinct from either earth or water. For they are something composite. But we have said before that no composite is anything else besides its parts or has another essence than these parts.\(^{155}\)

However, let us recall that Gorlaeus’ theory of mixture also assumed that the atoms participating in a mixture exchanged their non-essential qualities (notably hot and cold) and thereby brought about the above-mentioned common ‘temperament’.

Importantly, this precise theory has parallels with Scaliger’s *Exercitationes exotericae de subtilitate* that are too close to be accidental. Although Gorlaeus inherited Cardano’s matter theory from his teacher De Veno, it would appear that he personally inclined much more to Cardano’s nemesis Scaliger, who is in fact the only modern philosopher he mentions in his work. In fact, he heaps praise on him, calling him “the most subtle of all philosophers.” It is also Scaliger whom he quotes in his boisterous entry in the *Album amicorum* of his friend Engelbert Egidius van Engelen, as has been mentioned earlier. In fact, he may have chosen both the title *Exercitationes philosophicae* and its division into ‘exercises’ in honor of Scaliger’s much cited book.

Admittedly, De Veno had also occasionally relied on Scaliger, following the latter, as we have seen, in rejecting the Aristotelian definition of ‘place’ (*locus*) in favor of a general ‘space’ (*spatium*). But Gorlaeus went further by also responding positively to Scaliger’s corpuscular interpretation of the *minima naturalia*, with which the chameleon Italian polemicist had explained a whole range of natural phenomena. We recall that Scaliger chose to ignore the categorical difference between a genuine Aristotelian *minimum* (which denotes the lower quantitative
limit of matter capable of sustaining a given substantial form or of performing an action) and a corpuscle (which describes an autonomous piece of substantial matter). This allowed him to claim, among other things, that the *minima naturalia* of an anvil are so densely arranged that they cannot be further compacted even by a hammer; that fire is stronger or weaker depending on whether its particles are closer or farther apart; that the density of the *minimae partes* generally explains the specific properties of substances; that fire divides earth into its *minima naturalia*; and that some substances have round or oblong *corpuscula*. In fact, among the sixteenth-century authors who pretended to remain faithful to the spirit of Aristotle’s philosophy while transforming the notion of *minima* in the direction of independent material units, or atoms, Scaliger is probably both the most extreme and the most prominent.

But for all his apparent admiration for Scaliger, by replacing the latter’s ill-defined *minima* with fully fledged atoms, Gorlaeus took a radical further step. We recall from above that he accepted Scaliger’s famous definition of mixture as “the motion of the minimal bodies towards mutual contact, so that a union is brought about,” adding that “by minimal bodies, we mean individual atoms.” In 1629 the influential Wittenberg professor of medicine and chemist Daniel Sennert was to subject Scaliger’s definition to a similar transformation, by claiming that what Scaliger had “without doubt” intended by his ‘minima’ were Democritean atoms. However, both Sennert and Gorlaeus were mistaken in their interpretation; but while Sennert realized full well that he was, but decided to invoke Scaliger simply to buttress his case, Gorlaeus may possibly have believed that his own reinterpretation remained faithful to the underlying idea formulated by that much-admired author.

If Scaliger represents the acme of the sixteenth-century north-Italian tendency to understand Aristotelian *minima naturalia* as independent corpuscles, Gorlaeus represents the moment in which minimism officially converted to atomism and in so doing became an overtly *anti*-Aristotelian doctrine. It is this anti-scholastic turn away from Aristotle that utterly distinguishes Gorlaeus from Scaliger.

At this point in our investigation, the following question arises: from whom did Gorlaeus take his own overt atomism? Certainly not from Scaliger, who despite his own corpuscular tendencies — or, if you like, his latent crypto-atomism — repeatedly condemns this doctrine, insisting that

if the forms remained intact, mixture would in truth be a mere heap. [...] These would be true Democritean atoms. Hence they would be certain quantities, not parts of a single mixt, but each would be a totality to itself.
But Gorlaeus claims, as we have seen, precisely the contrary: each atom, being an *ens per se*, is “a totality to itself.”

While our analysis of the teaching in natural philosophy that Gorlaeus enjoyed at Franeker, enriched by references to Cardano’s and Scaliger’s matter theories, has helped us find the origin of Gorlaeus’ theory of elements and even of some of his specific corpuscular explanations, the provenance of his atomist ontology, this capping stone of his physics, has so far eluded our grasp. So as to find this last element, we must continue to follow him through his life and move on to Leiden.

3.7. **GORLÆUS AT LEIDEN**

Gorlaeus’ Franeker education and the authors to whom he was introduced there explain a great number of elements of his own metaphysics and natural philosophy. But they fail to answer the following questions: What were the reasons that persuaded Gorlaeus to develop De Veno’s matter theory and Scaliger’s minimism further into an explicitly atomist doctrine? And why did he make physical atomism depend on a fully developed “prima philosophia de ente,” an ontology that included God, humans and physical bodies alike? Finally, why did he, at such an early stage in his academic education, complete two treatises the publication of which would have befitted a university professor, but not a beginning theology student?

In order to explain these questions, we must try to understand what happened to Gorlaeus as he moved on to Leiden. Unfortunately for us, there exists a temporal gap between his graduation from Franeker, probably in 1609 or 1610, and the moment, on 23 April 1611, when “David Gorlaeus, from Utrecht, aged 20, student of theology, [lodging] with Magdalena, daughter of Laurentius,” enrolled at Leiden’s theological faculty. This date of April 1611, precisely a year before he passed away, is relatively late. What had Gorlaeus done in the meantime?

Before other documents surface, this question must unfortunately remain unresolved. All we currently have of this period is Gorlaeus’ entry into the *Album amicorum* of Engelbert Egidius (which will be discussed below), dated 25 June 1610. Jaeger has concluded from this entry that Gorlaeus lived at Leiden the year before he started studying. But in contrast to just about all other inscriptions, Gorlaeus does not indicate a place name, and there is no indication that Engelbert Egidius (who had just returned from his academic pilgrimage and started working as a minister in Arnhem) had in 1610 spent time in Leiden. Nor would it have been financially attractive to move to a university town without registering as a student. In fact, Gerben Wierda has postulated that it was more likely that the two men met in Franeker, and as evidence takes the entry in Engelbert Egidius’
Album written by the reverend Christoph Hardenberg at Franeker, in September 1611. As Hardenberg’s inscription starts in Hebrew, Wierda proposes, it might have been that Engelbert Egidius was privately studying Hebrew with the Franeker professor Johannes Drusius. Alas, this interesting hypothesis can currently not be confirmed. By the time Hardenberg signed Egidius’ Album, Gorlaeus was already studying theology in Leiden. Furthermore, Egidius’ name does not feature in Franeker’s student register; it would have been highly unusual and financially unrewarding for a student to spend so much time at a university without formal enrollment – the time lag between Gorlaeus’ and Hardenberg’s entries being fourteen months. However, as Wierda has also documented, Arnhem’s church council was looking for a new minister in early 1610 and had cast its eye on a certain Henricus Meiling, who was at the time minister in a village near Leeuwarden. It may conceivably have been the case that Egidius traveled to negotiate the position and that he may have combined such a trip with a visit to Franeker to discuss with Drusius his commissioned work on a new translation of the Book of Hebrews.

Whatever happened in 1610, and irrespective of the date of Gorlaeus’ move from Friesland to Leiden, what seems clear is that he had started working on his own philosophy back home. His friend Stellingwerff’s reference to the ambitious works that he was engaged in seems to confirm this. It would also explain why the manuscript of the Idea physicae, although apparently completed, was not published, and why Gorlaeus chose to absorb its physical doctrines into his almost megalomaniacal metaphysical treatise. The new influences that he worked into the Exercitationes, and which are absent from the Idea, would suggest a change of mind. This change of mind may, as we shall now see, have been caused by Engelbert Egidius, in whose Album Gorlaeus immortalized himself. It is certainly also due to theological and political circumstances, which we shall now have to examine.

The likely causes behind his change of mind carry two names that are of great importance to the early history of the Netherlands: the Arminian Crisis and the Vorstius Affair. There exists an extremely precious testimonial which, though written down thirty years after the composition of Gorlaeus’ two works, is of extraordinary precision. The context of this testimonial takes us to the Utrecht Crisis, that violent controversy over Descartes’ teaching that started in 1641 and led to the condemnation of Cartesianism at that university. As has been adumbrated before and shall be told in some detail in chapter 4, that quarrel was initially triggered when the professor of medicine, Henricus Regius, had one of his students defend a thesis according to which “man was a composite being” (ens per accidens). When he was attacked for this view as well as for his Cartesian positions more generally by Utrecht’s leading theologian, Gijsbert Voetius, Regius defended himself by arguing that this was neither his own thesis, nor Descartes’, but had been lifted
out of Gorlaeus’ *Exercitationes*. This explanation, instead of soothing Voetius’ anger, only served to enraged him further. In a tremendously long-winded sentence, which, however, overbrims with extremely useful factual information, the theologian penned the following denunciation:

The paradoxical claim [about man being an *ens per accidens*] made […] by Taurellus (who was called an atheist physician by the Heidelberg theologians in their judgement on Vorstius’ *De Deo*, which they sent to the delegates of the Synod of Holland in 1610), and which, due to the imprudence of youth, our compatriot David Gorlaeus took up in his *Exercitationes philosophicae*, a book he wrote in a moment when, beginning his theological studies or rather preparing himself for them, he was attacked by doubts and hesitations […] is contrary to truth.¹⁶⁹

These densely argued lines contain several precious pieces of information, which we now have to disentangle and interpret, as they contain an abundance of clues concerning the background and thrust of Gorlaeus’ *Exercitationes*.

To begin with, Voetius states that Gorlaeus wrote his *Exercitationes* not during his “theological studies” but “rather” while “preparing himself” for them. This confirms us in our idea that Gorlaeus must have been working on his treatise before enrolling at Leiden’s Faculty of Theology in April 1611. But whether this ‘preparation’ took place in Leiden or back in Friesland, remains unclear. Furthermore, in the testimonial just quoted, Voetius mentions an affair surrounding a work called *De Deo* by Conrad Vorstius, a figure who has already repeatedly been mentioned. He was the Steinfurt theologian whom Leiden University had chosen as Arminius’ successor in 1610, but who was forced to leave Leiden almost immediately after his arrival in 1611 because the general uproar caused by his theological positions had become unmanageable. As we shall see in detail below, the affair came to a head in the very period that Gorlaeus was in Leiden. The name ‘Taurellus’, in turn, refers to the German philosopher Nicolaus Taurellus, whose theological ontology – first presented in his *Philosophiae triumphus* (Basel, 1573) – did indeed exert a certain influence on Vorstius and was in some quarters viewed as a dangerously heterodox philosopher.

Voetius’ claim that there is a direct link connecting Taurellus, Vorstius and Gorlaeus is not only suggestive but, as we shall see below, convincing. Besides Voetius’ assertion of 1641 and the evidence that a comparison of Gorlaeus’ doctrines with the writings of Taurellus and Vorstius can yield, we fortunately also possess some direct biographical evidence to corroborate this affiliation. There are two persons with whom we know Gorlaeus to have been acquainted in the period 1610-1611. Both strengthen the hypothesis that he was intellectually affiliated with the Arminian camp and that the intellectual debt that Voetius suggested in 1641 corresponds to the truth.
The first figure is Engelbert Egidius van Engelen (c. 1584-1642), whose *Album amicorum* is today kept at Leiden’s University Library. This *Album* contains an exuberantly juvenile entry by Gorlaeus, dated 25 June 1610. Engelbert Egidius had started this *Album* in 1606 after finishing his theological education at Leiden and before setting off for his *peregrinatio academica* through France, Switzerland and Germany. Dozens of (partly very famous) academics inscribed themselves between February 1606 (Leiden, the point of departure) and April 1609 (Heidelberg, the last stop of his academic tour). The *Album* contains a single inscription from 1610 (by Gorlaeus – but where did the two meet?) and one from 1611 (by Hardenberg in Franeker).\(^{170}\)

But let us turn to Gorlaeus’ entry, which constitutes right now the only autograph we have of his hand. The album page is reproduced in Figure 15. The boisterous entry states, in translation, as follows:

> The home (*patria*) of a prudent man is wherever he is at ease (Julius Scaliger, in his Poems).
> This is the sum of all my sums: It is stupid, lazy and of leaden madness to omit action and grow old with words.
> I have written this entry with my own hand as a perpetual memory of myself and as a token of my most friendly disposition towards Engelbert of Engelen, of Arnhem in Gelderland, much commended by his true virtue, solid erudition and moral integrity, much-praised candidate in true philosophy and singular friend of mine, on 25 June 1610.
> David Gorlaeus of Utrecht.
> Motto: Virtue shall find its way.
> Even if everyone holds the opposite view, truth must be defended. And one must judge one’s own teacher in the same way as one’s greatest enemy. This be your eternal rule!
> Live, and remember us.\(^{171}\)

The tone of the entry suggests that Gorlaeus and Engelbert Egidius knew each other well, but as mentioned, we know nothing about the origin of their relationship. Egidius was eight years older than Gorlaeus. Born in Arnhem, he had enrolled at Leiden for literary studies in 1601 and had later moved on to theology. In 1605, he defended a set of theological theses under Franciscus Gomarus. In 1609, he became minister in Oosterbeek, a village in the neighborhood of his hometown, and subsidiary preacher in Arnhem. He lived and preached in Arnhem, although he never received a regular appointment there. The ministers and the church council being torn between the conflicting currents within the Reformed Church, all preachers in Arnhem had to sign, in 1614, an Act in which they had to
promise, among several other things, “to avoid the particular names of Arminians, Remonstrants and Contraremonstrants from the pulpit.” Although apparently cautious and non-polemical, Engelbert Egidius was according to church historians “in heart and soul a Remonstrant”; and so, when the provincial synod of Gelderland, held in Nijmegen in 1619, required of all ministers to subscribe to the anti-Remonstrant articles of the Synod of Dort, Engelbert Egidius was found to hesitate just a bit too long, and was consequently sacked. For the rest of his life, he was counted among the Remonstrants. In fact, he was reinstated later in his life as an official preacher in Arnhem’s Remonstrant church.

Despite the paucity of the available information, Egidius provides us with a highly suggestive clue concerning the stipulated intellectual between Taurellus, Vorstius and Gorlaeus. Taurellus’ ground-breaking *Philosophiae triumphus*, from which Gorlaeus was to take the idea of man as an *ens per accidens*, was republished in 1617 in a very unlikely place, namely Arnhem, by the town’s only printer, Jan Janssen (Janssonius). This second edition, which is identical to the first down to the details of the layout, and up to its inclusion of Taurellus’ original dedication letter to a nobleman, does not so much as hint at the reasons that led to its produc-
tion. Interestingly, however, it can be demonstrated that in the years that he was preaching in Arnhem, Engelbert Egidius was collaborating with Janssen’s press. In 1615, for example, Janssen published the Dutch translation of a French treatise narrating the conversion, the year before, of a French Capuchin to the Protestant faith. This work had been translated by Engelbert Egidius, who dedicated the book to Arnhem’s governors. It is therefore plausible to assume that it was he who cajoled Janssen into republishing Taurellus’ voluminous philosophical work, all the more as this philosophically and theologically charged work was so clearly associated with the Calvinist current with which Egidius was associated.

To be sure, Taurellus had already featured in De Veno’s disputations of 1603-1606, though not prominently. But given Taurellus’ much stronger influence on Gorlaeus (which will be documented below), Gorlaeus’ friendship with Engelbert Egidius and the latter’s presumable involvement in the publication of the second edition of Taurellus’ Philosophiae triumphus, is not at all implausible to see in Gorlaeus’ inscription in Engelbert Egidius’ Album the reflection of an important intellectual bond, in which generally Arminian inclinations were transformed into a more explicit sympathy for the embattled theologian Vorstius and for the alleged source of some of his metaphysical ideas, namely Taurellus.

Gorlaeus’ second acquaintance from the period 1610-1611 is even more adventurous. We recall that when he enrolled at Leiden University, he indicated as his address the house of “Magdalena, daughter of Laurentius.” Six weeks later, on 4 June, a certain “Rudolphus ab Echten” signed up at the same university indicating the same address. What no historian seems to have realized is that the young and affluent nobleman Rudolph van Echten (1592-1643) was the same figure who had a few months before contributed to that immense Socinian scandal at Franeker mentioned above. Van Echten, who was half a year younger than Gorlaeus, had first been sent to the Steinfurt Academy by his parents. In May 1610, he enrolled at Franeker, the registers of which record, as the university’s 1188th student, one “Rudolphus ab Echten, nobleman from Drenthen, coming from the Steinfurt school.” In the same year, a number of other students reached Franeker from Steinfurt who had all, in one way or another, imbibed Socinian sympathies already before arriving and probably also bristled at the theologically intolerant atmosphere at the Frisian institution and at the dogged and inquisitorial behavior of Sijbrand Lubbert, the professor of theology.

Lubbert, who was at the time working on a book against Socinianism – the heterodox, anti-Trinitarian sect set up by Fausto Sozzini, which was at the time perceived by all established confessions as the most dangerous theological movement on the European scene – seems to have peppered his lectures with invectives against Sozzini. For reasons that are not easy to comprehend given the foolishness of the enterprise and the dangers involved, a number of students, mostly from
Steinfurt, decided in late 1610 or early 1611 to publish Sozzini’s *De officio hominis Christiani* (which has been mentioned earlier). Although the author of the treatise was not mentioned explicitly and the place of publication was given as the “City of Peace” (*Irenopolis*), it transpired soon enough that this work (which in hallucinatory madness pretended to enjoy the approval and privileges of both the Pope and the Spanish king!) had in truth been published at Franeker. This discovery caused an immense scandal with the local authorities; for, in this book, Sozzini reiterated just about every heresy for which he was so notorious: he reproached the Protestants for not having carried the Reformation to its obvious conclusion by abolishing such Catholic additions to the original faith like the Trinity, the divinity of Christ and the role of the Holy Spirit and by adhering to erroneous views about baptism, the Eucharist, predestination and the absence of free will.\(^{180}\)

Once rumors had sprung up that this heretical tract had been published in Friesland, church, secular and university authorities intervened speedily. In May or June 1611, student chambers were searched; the printer was unmasked; and upon finding epistolary evidence and having cross-examined students, it was established that a group of students, who had for some time taken an active interest in Sozzini’s theology and had even established epistolary links with Socinians elsewhere, were behind this *editio princeps* of Sozzini’s *De officio*. Not all, but most of these students had a Steinfurt connection and, to make matters more explosive, they had a connection to Vorstius, who was at the time awaiting official approval to succeed Arminius in the Leiden chair of theology. Of these students, Bernard Fockenbeck had been at Steinfurt before enrolling at Franeker and in 1609, when Steinfurt was not yet a suspicious place, he had (like Arnoldi in the *De Veno* disputation, discussed above) dedicated a Franeker disputation to his Steinfurt teachers Vorstius and Timpler. Heinrich Welsing’s connection was even stronger: he had been Vorstius’ amanuensis for no less than five years, before moving over to Franeker in September 1610.\(^{181}\) Jacob Omphalius, in turn, whom interrogations unmasked as the driving force behind the Socinian publication, had since his arrival from Steinfurt repeatedly clashed with Lubbert and Franeker’s Academic Senate.\(^{182}\) Certain documents suggest that Omphalius was also acting as a tutor to the somewhat younger baronet Van Echten, whom he somehow got involved in the plot to publish Sozzini’s *De officio*.

As the authorities cracked down on the group, its members quickly dispersed. While the Germans fled back to Steinfurt, the Dutch went to Leiden, which, as one Frisian observer noted, threatened to become “a hospice and asylum of such people.”\(^{183}\) Aemilius Trebatius, the chief Frisian member of the Socinian group and probably the author of the explanatory postscript to *De officio*, had removed himself from Frisian jurisdiction to Leiden in June, although he only enrolled at Leiden the year thereafter.\(^{184}\) The same holds true for the young Van Echten, who
also rushed to Leiden where, as we have seen, he inscribed himself in philosophy and arts on 4 June. Keeping a low profile in the hope of going unrecognized, he changed some details about his identity: remaining silent about his nobility, he downplayed his age (indicating 18 years instead of 20) and altered the name of his birth-place: the university official transliterated his mumblings as “Drechtanus,” a funny mix-up of the place name “Echtanus” (“from Echten”), the homonymous estate of which he had been proprietor since 1607, and “Drentanus” (“from Drenthe”), the name of his province of origin.

Like Van Echten, Gorlaeus was – at least on his mother’s side – of noble birth; and as the records of the 1606 Franeker book auction indicate, his purchasing power was noteworthy. One must therefore assume that the lodgings that the two rebellious upper-class students shared in the house of “Magdalena, daughter of Laurentius,” belonged to the upmarket type. However, much more interesting about this roommate is the light that it sheds on Gorlaeus. Had Gorlaeus, too, been involved in the plot to publish Sozzini? Had he, too, left for Leiden as a consequence of the discovery that Irenopolis was in reality Franeker?

Unfortunately, we do not know. At any rate, it is evident that Gorlaeus knew, frequented and – judging by his writings – sympathized with figures who in more or less radical ways sided with the Arminian faction, supported Arminius’ supposed successor, Vorstius, and read unsavory philosophical authors such as Taurellus or such dangerous heretics such as Sozzini. When Voetius, in the convoluted historical declaration, cited above, writes that Gorlaeus had developed his philosophical views in a period of juvenile disorientation, it must now be obvious what he meant by this: Gorlaeus had come under bad influences and was siding with theologically aberrant groups.\(^{185}\)

Having briefly introduced the theme of Arminianism, Conrad Vorstius and Nicolaus Taurellus from the perspective of Gorlaeus’ mauvaises fréquentations at Franeker and Leiden, let us now approach them also from the point of view of the history of philosophy and theology and insert Gorlaeus’ own thought into that intellectual landscape.

### 3.8. Jacob Arminius and the Beginning of the Arminian Controversy

The Arminian controversy and the violent tones it quickly assumed are nowadays hard to understand and to explain. However, in the years 1610 and 1611, in which the bulk of Gorlaeus’ manuscripts was written, it would have been impossible for any intellectually active Dutchman to ignore it; and if one was, like Gorlaeus, about to become a theologian, and specifically at the University of Leiden where
the controversy had broken out and where it continued to have its epicenter, it would have been impossible not to side with one of the two quarrelling factions. Moreover, in 1611, only 21 new students enrolled in theology at Leiden, and all of them were expected to choose their side in this issue.  

Let us therefore briefly explain the origin of the controversy and the point it reached in Gorlaeus’ days.

The Reformation had been spreading in the Low Countries slowly since the 1520s and more rapidly after 1550, with the propertied middle classes in Flanders and Brabant being drawn to the new faith more quickly than the peasant populations, partly as a reaction to the absolutist tendencies of the Spanish Habsburgs that threatened their political and economic liberties. As the state fought the Reformation as a heresy, it seemed quite natural for the discontented groups to oppose the church together with the state. Prince William of Orange, the king’s lieutenant (stadtholder) in Holland and Zeeland, began in 1564 to intercede with King Philip II of Spain in favor of a more flexible approach towards non-Catholics, but to no avail. An explosive combination of Spanish inquisitorial intolerance, economic hardship brought about by excessive additional taxation and religious fervour led, in 1566, to local rebellions that degenerated into iconoclastic attacks on churches and monasteries. In reaction to the fast-spreading “Protestant fury,” the Spanish crown dispatched an army led by the notoriously inflexible Duke of Alba, who quickly cracked down on the local nobility and citizenry. The result of the ensuing hardening of the situation is well known: it is the Dutch rebellion against the Habsburg Empire, which became irreversible once Philip II had declared William of Orange an outlaw in 1580, and the States-General responded to the king with their Act of Abjuration.

It would take until 1648, and the length of the so-called Eighty Years’ War, for this break to yield a fully sovereign Dutch state. What matters in our present context is that in the process, it was not the Lutheran type of Reformation that gained the upper hand in the Low Countries, but its Calvinist variant. In the early period of the rebellion, various cities in Flanders emulated Geneva, by setting up what is often described as “Calvinist Republics.” When Alessandro Farnese, Duke of Parma, conquered Antwerp and other towns in Flanders and Brabant, ‘heretics’ were given two years to leave the territory. About 200,000 persons are estimated to have followed this unkind invitation, migrating north and thereby strengthening the Calvinist component of what was slowly solidifying into the Netherlands. Although ‘Calvinist’ is not the label that the Dutch Protestants used for themselves, it has become the historian’s name for the more severe and doctrinally rigid form of Protestantism that came to dominate the Netherlands, given that it drew theological inspiration from Geneva’s reformer and was institutionally linked to...
Geneva and Heidelberg. Its theology entailed a tightly structured church government with regional units (classes) and provincial and national organs (synods) and with a high degree of mutual supervision and doctrinal homogeneity. The pillars on which this homogeneity was to be built were the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) and the Belgic Confession (1561).

The controversy to which we must now turn and which was to tear the Dutch Protestant Church apart in the early seventeenth century is best approached from these two documents. It all started off with that thorny issue of predestination – the question of whether God, in his omnipotence, eternity, omniscience and immutability, had from all eternity decreed all events that took place in the world; and, more narrowly, whether our individual election to paradise or condemnation was likewise predetermined. The Heidelberg Catechism did not address the issue directly, but the *locus classicus* is question 54 and its answer:

*What do you believe concerning the holy and catholic church of Christ?* I believe that the Son of God from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves to himself by his Spirit and word, out of the whole human race, a church chosen to everlasting life, agreeing in true faith, and that I am and forever shall remain a living member thereof.

In turn, article 16 of the *Confessio Belgica* stated:

*We believe that when Adam's entire offspring worked its own destruction through the sin of the first man, God showed himself for what He is, namely merciful and just. Merciful, since He rescues and delivers from doom those whom He in his eternal and unchangeable counsel out of sheer grace has chosen in Jesus Christ, our Lord, regardless of their works. Just, since He leaves the others in the fall and doom, which they have brought down upon themselves.*

Before it reached the Netherlands, the debate concerning predestination has had a long theological prehistory (going back to the Apostle Paul), and a much shorter Calvinist trajectory, which started with Geneva’s reformer Jean Calvin and his successor, Theodor Beza. Neither need detain us here. Suffice it to say that the theological debate that sprung up in the Netherlands in the first years of the seventeenth century quickly grew in intensity and bitterness and eventually led to a schism within the Dutch Protestant Church. The Dutch debate as such and the liberal, latitudinarian interpretation of predestination, however, took their name from the theologian Jacob Arminius (1559/60-1609; see Figure 16).

Born as Jacob Hermansz. in the small Dutch town of Oudewater, Arminius obtained his training first at Marburg (1574-75) and then at the University of Leiden.
(1576-1582), which had been founded the year before his arrival.\textsuperscript{192} In fact, Arminius was but the thirteenth student to enroll at this new institution.\textsuperscript{193} A grant from Amsterdam’s merchant guild allowed him to continue his theological studies in Geneva (1582-1587) under Jean Calvin’s stern successor, Theodor Beza (1519-1605). He interrupted his Genevan studies for a longer stint in Basel (1582-1584). With a letter of recommendation by Beza, addressed to the Amsterdam city counselor and praising his intellectual talents, Arminius returned to Amsterdam. However, for his return, he took a rather unusual detour, visiting Italy for several months. His opponents would later allege that he had gone to Rome to kiss the pope’s slippers. Whether he had seen the pope from far away or up close is uncertain.\textsuperscript{194} What is certain, by contrast, is that he stopped in Padua, where he attended a number of lectures by the famous logician and natural philosopher Jacopo Zabarella. Upon his eventual return to the Netherlands, he was ordained a minister in Amsterdam in 1588 and served as a pastor until his appointment as university professor in 1603.

Even in the years of his ministry, however, Arminius aroused the suspicion of some of his colleagues for his alleged support for a number of non-orthodox positions, also with respect to the bothersome question of predestination. For the present purposes, it is this specific problem that interests us most. “Arminius never

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{arminius.png}
\caption{Jacob Arminius, engraving by Willem van Swanenburg, from Icones ad vivum delineatae et expressae (Leiden, 1609). This oldest dated portrait is analyzed in Tolsma, “Iconographia Arminiana,” 241.}
\end{figure}
rejected predestination.” Marius van Leeuwen has protested, “but probably, from the beginning of his ministry, inclined to an infralapsarian idea of it.” But what exactly does this ‘inclination’ imply? The term ‘infralapsarianism’ refers to the Fall (lapsus) of man that was caused by Adam and Eve’s disobedience to God and their subsequent expulsion from Paradise. Ever since, and by virtue of the transmission of this original sin from generation to generation, humankind has existed in a fallen state. There was, of course, that central figure of the redeeming incarnation of God, Jesus Christ, who with his death on the cross had atoned for mankind’s sinfulness. However, he had not washed away all sin tout court. After all, it was known through scriptural revelation that only a few were elected to be forgiven and obtain eternal life in Heaven, or Paradise, while the majority of humans would be left in their fallen state and end up in Hell. So much, in very rough outline, was commonly agreed upon between the various Christian confessions.

What was disputed, by contrast, was whether the individual human being could contribute anything to his or her personal salvation, and if so, how. The Catholic Church emphasized faith, to be sure, but also stressed the importance of good works – not just prayer and moral conduct, but also acts of benevolence, including quite notoriously the payment of money to the Church itself in the purchase of indulgences. The Calvinist standpoint, by contrast, insisted that salvation could be obtained sola fide, ‘through faith alone’. Now, given that faith was not something that in the eyes of Calvinist theologians could be acquired through an act of will, which was not free anyway, but was instead a gift of God, it seemed to follow that the individual couldn’t do anything about his or her election, which was entirely in the hands of God.

This doctrine of predestination – one’s election (or otherwise) even before one had the chance of proving oneself worthy of it – did not only rely on theological considerations, but rested above all on philosophical logic. A God that was defined to be both eternal and omniscient could not but predict ab aeterno who would be saved and who would not. His decision (which was referred to as decretum or ‘decrees’) as to whom he would save from damnation and whom he would leave in a fallen state preceded the birth of the individual in question. We have seen, above, the precise way in which the Belgic Confession couched this understanding.

Within the dire logic of predestination, there were additional theological distinctions that could be battled out. We have just mentioned that Arminius was suspected from early on to be favorable to the ‘infralapsarian’ interpretation of the doctrine of predestination over the more orthodox position of ‘supralapsarianism’. This distinction refers to the moment at which God took his ‘decrees’ regarding individual election or otherwise: had it been before the Fall of man (‘supralapsarian’) or afterwards (‘infralapsarian’)? This question, over which much ink was spilled, had theological implications regarding God’s relation to the Fall itself.
(had he foreseen or possibly even willed it?), but, as is obvious, also strictly logical implications. If God is defined as one and inseparable, and if he lives and thinks in eternity and not in actual, creaturely time, it is difficult to explain a change of mind in response to temporal events taking place under an apple tree.196

This brief survey of the two views on predestination allows us to return to Arminius. When in 1602, two of the three theology professors at Leiden were swept away by the plague, Arminius’ name came up as a possible successor of Franciscus Junius, one of the plague victims. Notably, Johannes Wtenbogaert, Arminius’ friend since their common Genevan days, who had in the meantime become court chaplain to Prince Maurice, lobbied for Arminius. Franciscus Gomarus, Leiden’s only surviving theologian and thus professor primarius, nurtured severe doubts concerning Arminius’ suitability, accusing him of Pelagianism, which in this case came down to the charge of ascribing free will to man. However, after a conversation with the proposed candidate, he agreed to supervise Arminius’ doctoral degree, which he granted in July 1603. With this degree in hand, Arminius was permitted to take the Leiden chair. Less than a year later, however, the theological strife that would soon give birth to the Arminian current within Calvinism was already in full swing between the two theologians. In two sets of student disputations, both defended in 1604, their differing views on predestination became manifest.197

It was really the definition and, as it were, the mechanism of predestination that divided the two men. Once again, their differences of opinion are so subtle, and from a modern theological viewpoint so minimal, that it is difficult to understand the agitation that they managed to stir up and which would soon turn into veritable hatred. While attempting to avoid the heresy of Pelagianism, which deemed man capable of obtaining salvation by his own nature, Arminius at the same time also tried to avoid the blasphemous implication that God was the originator of sin – an implication that seemed to follow from the notion that God had from the beginning, and possibly even before the act of creation, decided whom to save from an original sin that was yet to take place and whom to condemn. In a rather complex formulation, he therefore defined predestination as “the decree of God’s good pleasure in Christ, by which he resolved within himself from eternity, to justify, adopt, and bestow with eternal life believers, whom he decreed to bestow with faith, to the praise of his glorious grace.”198 However roundabout and diplomatic this formula may seem to us, Arminius’ insistence that “this is the will of God that everyone who sees the Son [Christ] and believes in Him will have eternal life” attributed, in the eyes of Gomarus and the divines that followed him, too much of a role to faith in Christ as a precondition for election, which therefore seemed to become in some sense conditional. To be sure, Arminius did not make salvation depend on the combination of faith and good works, as Catholics did, but he did attribute to the individual the capacity to resist salvation, by deliberately counter-
acting the faith that God had bestowed on him. For this reason, his theological
opponents soon convinced themselves that “by diminishing the role of God and
pleading for human freedom, Arminius distanced himself from the Reformed confes-
sion” and notably the Confessio Belgica and the Heidelberg Catechism.¹⁹⁹

Soon, the theological debate assumed political overtones, for, as it heated up
and threatened to get out of hand, Arminius proposed that it should be solved,
or at least supervised, by the civil authorities, whose task he felt it should also be
to make sure that a certain amount of dissent – a certain ‘latitude’, as the Eng-
lish tongue would soon put it – could be tolerated. In necessariis unitas, in non
necessariis libertas, in omnibus caritas (“Unity in things necessary; liberty in things
non-necessary; and in everything charity”) was in due time to become a famous
slogan among Arminians. Arminius’ so-called Erastian approach (named after the
sixteenth-century theologian Thomas Erastus, who had pleaded that civil authori-
ties, not the Church, should punish the sins of the faithful), was indeed to become
a trademark of the Arminian faction. Important sympathizers such as the theolo-
gian Wtenbogaert and the lawyer Hugo de Groot developed it further.²⁰⁰

However, precisely this apparently tolerant, state-supervised approach to reli-
gious discussion was seen by Arminius’ opponents to be yet another sign of his
non-committal leniency towards Catholic, Jesuitical and Spanish interests and thus
as treacherous and damaging gestures of prostration to the enemy of the young
Dutch Republic.²⁰¹ This accusation of Romewardness and treason was of course
grave and turned Arminius into an object of incessant insults, as pasquinades were
placarded all over the city of Leiden, attacking or ridiculing him. And quickly, as
the controversy grew bigger, it spilled beyond Leiden’s boundaries, soon involving
preachers, universities and magistrates all over the country and also abroad. After
all, Gomarus himself had claimed that the issues involved were worth a civil war:
“province against province, church against church, city against city, citizen against
citizen!”²⁰² (See Figure 17)

From a theological point of view, Arminius’ Declaration of his Sentiments with
Respect to the Predestination of October 1608, delivered to the States of Holland
and West-Friesland, is generally considered the clearest and also boldest statement
of his views.²⁰³ In it, Arminius insisted that God was not in the first instance an
immutable judge, electing or damning ab initio. His “first precise and absolute
decree” had not been the predestination of individuals to salvation or damna-
tion, but “the salvation of sinful Man.”²⁰⁴ He had prepared “in a sufficient and
efficacious manner the means which were necessary for repentance and faith” –
which left some space for individuals to repent and believe.²⁰⁵ Finally, God had
not decided beforehand who would repent and believe, and therefore be saved,
although he “knew from eternity” who would do so. In other words, Arminius
divided God’s foreknowledge from his will, thereby leaving space for individuals
to grasp their chance and contribute to their salvation—or to lose God’s grace in case of an obstinate refusal to accept it. In a witty pro-Arminian pamphlet, *The Predestined Thief*, the criminal protagonist shrewdly argues along orthodox lines to the effect that he had no reason to mend or repent his ways, since he knew that his election was independent of his behavior, backing his arguments with well-chosen quotations from Calvin, Beza, Gomarus and Piscator.

Arminius’ opponent Gomarus delivered a speech in December of the same year, also before the States of Holland and West-Friesland, explaining why he deemed Arminius’ views to be “unbiblical, heretical and confused.” The State subsequently urged the two men to come to an agreement during a reconciliatory meeting early the following year. But Arminius, who was already too ill from tuberculosis, had to return from the meeting to Leiden, where he passed away on 19 October 1609. Petrus Bertius (1565-1629), regent of Leiden’s Theological College (“Statencollege”) and an old friend of Arminius (as well as an acquaintance of Gorlaeus’ uncle, Abraham), held the much publicized funerary oration, and began organizing the succession. As for the oration, it depicted Arminius as a peaceful man whose life had been soured by envious enemies. Rather than putting an end
to the whole affair, Bertius’ oration only poured oil on the flames, provoking angry reactions first of all on the part of Gomarus himself, who speedily published his Considerations Concerning Bertius’ Funerary Oration.\textsuperscript{210}

Instead of quenching the debate, Arminius’ death only marked the transition from an individual stand-off to a collective one. On 14 January 1610, the draft of a so-called Remonstrance, which was probably formulated by Johannes Wtenbogaert, was signed by 44 ministers and in June of the same year submitted in a somewhat altered form to the States of Holland and West-Friesland. What had begun as the view of single theologian, Arminius, had with this act grown into ‘Arminianism’ or, indeed, ‘Remonstrantism’. Attempts by the Grand-Pensionary Johan van Oldenbarnevelt and the famous lawyer Hugo Grotius to bring about a climate of tolerance failed, or were rather seen as pro-Arminian latitudinarianism avant la lettre.

In 1617, Prince Maurice took the consequential step of openly siding with the anti-Arminians, when instead of attending the Sunday service of his court chaplain, the Arminian Wtenbogaert, he went to The Hague’s Kloosterkerk, which had recently been occupied by the anti-Arminians. Soon, a veritable persecution set in. Johan van Oldenbarnevelt and Hugo Grotius were arrested. The former, condemned for high treason, was beheaded; the latter received a life sentence (but famously managed to escape from Castle Loevestein hidden in a book chest). A national synod was finally organized. However, the Synod of Dort (1618-19), though organized according to Arminius’ Erastian ideas by the civil authorities, represented no attempt at reconciliation, but instead a severe crack-down on the Arminian faction, which was condemned as heretical (see Figure 18). Ministers who would not recant were expelled from the ministry.

The Synod of Dort was not the end of Arminianism, however. In the autumn of 1619, a number of exiled Arminians set up a Remonstrant fraternity in Antwerp, once more under the leadership of Johan Wtenbogaert. In 1621, Simon Episcopius wrote a confessional creed in order to give theological coherence to the exiled group and to rebut a series of attacks by opponents. The situation of the émigré sect only improved with the death of Prince Maurice and the succession of his brother, Prince Frederik Hendrik, as stadtholder in 1625. Wtenbogaert had been Frederik Hendrik’s tutor and had maintained good contacts with him. As a consequence, the Arminians were allowed to trickle back into the Netherlands. In 1630, they opened a new church in Amsterdam and in 1634 even a seminary in which they could educate their own clergy. This allowed the Remonstrant camp to develop into one of the “three systematic models arising out of Protestantism, the Reformed, the Lutheran, and the Arminian.”\textsuperscript{211} Its rationalism, on the one hand, and tolerance, on the other, were to prove their effectiveness in later decades of the seventeenth century; not only in the Netherlands, but also in England, the United States and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{212}
3.9. The Vorstius Affair

The Synod of Dort also sealed the fate of Conrad Vorstius, the theologian who had been appointed to fill Arminius’ vacant chair at Leiden University. As we recall from above, the Utrecht theologian Gijsbert Voetius would later associate Gorlaeus’ *Exercitationes* with one of Vorstius’ works, which is why we must now take a closer look at this historical character.

For this, we must return to 1610. We have just heard that Arminius’ death, while obviously putting an end to his personal struggle with his Leiden colleague and nemesis Gomarus, had also given birth to a wider movement. We recall that in the early months of 1610, 44 ministers had signed the so-called ‘Remonstrance’, which reiterated the main Arminian positions on predestination. Its so-called ‘five points’ asserted, in a succinct modern phrasing, that (1) election and condemnation on the Day of Judgement is conditioned by man’s rational faith or non-faith; (2) the atonement, while qualitatively adequate for every man, is efficacious only for the man of faith; (3) without the assistance of the Holy Spirit, no person is able to
respond to God’s will; (4) grace is not irresistible; and that (5) believers are able to resist sin but are not beyond the possibility of falling from grace.\(^{213}\)

At the same time, efforts were undertaken to appoint a successor to Arminius himself. Petrus Bertius, who had stirred up new emotions through his funerary oration, and Johannes Wtenbogaert, Arminius’ old ally and preacher to Prince Maurice, pressed for the appointment of Conrad Vorstius (1569-1622).

Born in Cologne and trained in theology first at Herborn and then at Heidelberg, where he took his doctorate under Johannes Piscator, Vorstius (see Figure 19) had passed through Geneva, like all credible Calvinist theologians, where he had defended a number of theses under Beza. We have already encountered him in his later position, as professor of theology at the Gymnasium Illustre at Steinfurt, which – as we may recall – had strong connections with the Netherlands in general and with Franeker in particular.

It was not easy to cajole Vorstius into accepting Arminius’ chair at Leiden. Aware of the factional fights at Leiden, he hesitated to place himself in such a vipers’ nest. He had already in 1599 encountered problems with the self-appointed watchdogs of orthodoxy, who had accused him of Arianism, of Unitarianism and, what was the worst accusation possible, of Socinianism.

Since these terms will recur in the few pages to come, it is useful to get them out of the way. ‘Arianism’ refers to the belief, first propagated in the fourth century AD by Arius, that Christ is not truly divine and was created \textit{ex nihilo} by God in a specific historical moment. This view obviously implied that Christ could not be considered on a par with God as a full member of the Holy Trinity. Further, an Arian would claim that only God is self-existent and immutable, while Christ is mutable. ‘Unitarianism’ can be related logically to ‘Arianism’: it is, roughly speaking, a system of Christian thought that derives its name from the doctrine that God, the Father, is a single personality, a doctrine that stands in opposition to the Trinitarians’ view that the divinity is three-fold. It is customary to regard Michael Servetus (burnt in Geneva in 1553) as well as Lelio and Fausto Sozzini (respectively 1525-1562 and 1539-1604) as the fathers of early modern Unitarianism. Fausto Sozzini in fact gave his name to various Unitarian movements. As a label, ‘Socinianism’ emerged towards the end of the sixteenth century and was generally perceived as the new and most dreadful threat to Protestant unity. Sozzini’s most important work, \textit{On the Saving Work of Christ}, argued that Christ’s death at the cross was in fact an exemplary case of (human) atonement.

The degree to which Vorstius must be considered a ‘Socinian’, a ‘crypto-Socinian’ or neither of the two need fortunately not be defined here. Whatever the truth of the matter may be, it is noteworthy that the label stuck. A full hundred years after the event, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, in the introduction to his \textit{Theodicy} of 1710, still associated Vorstius with the Socinians:
Even though there were no co-operation by God in evil actions, one could not help finding difficulty in the fact that he foresees them and that, being able to prevent them through his omnipotence, he yet permits them. This is why some philosophers and even some theologians have rather chosen to deny to God any knowledge of the detail of things and, above all, of future events, than to admit what they believed repellent to his goodness. The Socinians and Conrad Vorstius lean towards that side.\(^{214}\)

The link between Vorstius and the Socinians has at times been seen to reside not only in doctrinal overlaps (such as a reduction of the role and divine status of Jesus Christ or a limitation of God’s absolute powers, mentioned by Leibniz), but also in the historico-critical method of Bible exegesis that Vorstius first, and subsequently many Arminians, are said to have learned from Sozzini.\(^{215}\) The key publication in that respect was Sozzini’s *De auctoritate Sacrae Scripturae*, a book that he had composed in the late 1560s and first published under the name of a Jesuit, Dominicus Lopez. Because of its application of Lorenzo Valla’s critical method and Matthias Flacius Illyricus’ comparative method, *De auctoritate Sacrae Scripturae* has been described as the first modern case of a philological approach to the Bible.\(^{216}\) Astonishingly enough, Conrad Vorstius, in the middle of all the allegations that he was a
heterodox philo-Socinian, re-edited this very book in 1611 at Steinfurt, just before setting off to take the Leiden chair in theology that had been offered to him. In his defense, he stressed that this book had not aroused anyone’s suspicions, not even when it was published at Basel in 1592.\(^{217}\)

Vorstius’ overall publication policy of 1610 and 1611 appears indeed completely counter-intuitive. Back in 1599, it had required protracted negotiations, a flood of writings and a severe interrogation at Heidelberg to clear Vorstius’ name of the accusations of heresy raised against him. Having been through such turmoil before, he was understandably reluctant to change the relative tranquility of Steinfurt for the doctrinal turbulences at Leiden. That he eventually succumbed to the temptation to accept the Leiden chair turned out to be a fatal mistake; but his editorship of a Socinian work was outright incomprehensible. After all, his leanings towards the Arminian faction were outspoken, both politically and theologically. In an astonishingly frank and imprudent piece of political advice, which he offered in the dedicatory letter prefaced to his *Anti-Bellarminus* of early 1610, Vorstius told the Dutch States-General that they would be well advised to keep the Church under their full control and to make sure that theologians did not miss the true meaning of Christianity, which lay in living in faith and piety, and not in academic disputations and pamphlet wars. Such counsel, Vorstius continued, was necessary given that the evangelical churches had already suffered enough self-destructive fragmentation through the work of demagogical theologians. To avoid any further fragmentation, the state ought to allow for, and watch over, three types of freedom: freedom of conscience (*libertas conscientiae*), a native liberty (*nativa libertas*) in doctrinal interpretation and a freedom of preaching these interpretations publicly (*prophetandi libertas*).\(^{218}\)

It deserves to be mentioned in this context that Vorstius’ role in the evolution of the concept of a *libertas philosophandi* has been sorely neglected, although he quite clearly anticipated distinctions that are usually attributed to later Arminians like Philipp van Limborch. Let us point out that in his letter of 13 October 1611 to Isaac Casaubon, Vorstius also anticipates the important distinction between essential and non-essential doctrines when contesting Casaubon’s demand for synodal restrictions on theological views. Vorstius demanded that only doctrines directly grounded in Scripture should be imposed, whereas freedom of interpretation must be guaranteed for all other doctrines.\(^{219}\)

But to return to his dedication letter prefaced to his *Anti-Bellarminus* of 1610: his advice to the Dutch States-General added new arguments to the Erastian views of the Remonstrant faction. While it must have angered the anti-Remonstrants, it seems to have endeared him to the civil authorities, who were already negotiating with him about the Leiden chair. However, later in the same year, 1610, Vorstius also published an extended edition of a series of commented theological disputa-
tions previously defended at Steinfurt. It carried the title “Theological treatise on God, or: About God’s nature and attributes” (Tractatus theologicus de Deo, sive de natura et attributis Dei). The cry of his first biographer – ô librum natum in turbas! (“ah, what a book born into trouble!”) – captures but faintly the uproar this book created within the ranks of the anti-Arminians, who found its views befitting an “Atheist, pagan, Jew, Turk, heretic, schismatic, and ignoramus,” but certainly not a Calvinist theologian. Moreover, his opponents claimed with increasing insistence that Vorstius sympathized with, or even entertained direct links with, the Socinians. It seemed clear that he had taken a more than fleeting interest in Sozzini’s views not only back in 1599, when he had been admonished, but again, or still, in 1610. Even to the theologically uninstructed reader, it was obvious that his writings displayed doctrinal overlaps with the Unitarian views of the Socinians, notably concerning the alleged difference between God’s eternity and divinity and Christ’s temporal and at best semi-divine status.

In the light of all these allegations, the campaign to block Vorstius’ installation as professor gained increasing momentum and in the end became literally majestic as it involved a personal refutation of the doctrines contained in his De Deo by King James I of England and the public burning of his works in Oxford, Cambridge and London. The English crown became very much involved in the affair with its ambassador to the Netherlands, Ralph Winwood, going about agitating against the ‘monsterdier’, the “monstrous animal,” as which Vorstius had been unmasked. In his Church History of 1655, the English clergyman and historian Thomas Fuller narrates the prehistory of the English involvement in this affair. This is the character sketch he provides of Vorstius:

this wretch did seek to stoop God to man, by debasing his purity, assigning him a material body; confining his immensity, as not being everywhere; shaking his immutability, as if his will were subject to change; darkening his omniscient, as uncertain in future contingents: with many more monstrous opinions, fitter to be remanded to hell, than committed to writing.

A pamphlet war was well underway in 1610, long before Vorstius actually moved to Leiden, and it reached new levels of intensity as he was finally appointed on 23 August 1611, a few months after David Gorlaeus had formally enrolled in the theological faculty. Already by then, Vorstius’ precariously embattled situation had become untenable: the discovery, discussed above, that some of his students (including Gorlaeus’ roommate Van Echten) had published Sozzini’s De officio Christiani hominis at Franeker and that through these students, Vorstius appeared to be in contact with Polish Socinians, undermined his credibility even in the eyes of most of his erstwhile supporters. What the latter had looked for was a liberal,
but respectable theologian; what they got was instead a radical thinker who went far beyond anything that Arminius or his friends would ever have dared to think, let alone put on paper, and who moreover did not seem to be able to keep his own actions or those of his Steinfurt students under control.

When Vorstius’ protestation that there was no such Socinian connection began to look implausible even to his Dutch friends, Leiden University’s Academic Senate, which in electing him had braved immense political and ecclesiastical pressure, eventually yielded. With polemics threatening to become uncontrollable, its members decided to suspend Vorstius from his obligations, although they did not divest him of his appointment. Some sources declare that this suspension took place after merely three months of lecturing (which Gorlaeus would have been able to follow); other sources maintain that Vorstius was never even given the possibility to deliver a single lecture.225

From the city of Gouda, to which he had withdrawn in May 1612, he continued to defend himself in writing against numerous epistolary attacks. This uneasy state of affairs went on until the Synod of Dort, which cracked down on the entire Remonstrant current and specifically decided to ban Vorstius from Dutch territory. In the English translation of 1619, the final decree states as follows:

this venerable Synode [...] hath with ioynt suffrages declared [...], that the said Conrade Vorstius (besides that concerning the fiue controuerted Articles, he defendeth and maintaineth the errors of the Remonstrants, rejected by this Synode) doeth in his latter writings but especially in his Tractate, entitled, Of God and his attributes, make bold with, not one or two Articles of the reformed Religion, but most of the fundamentall heads of Diuinitie; namely, such as concerne the Trinitie of persons in the Godhead, the Simplicity, Infinitenesse, Immensitie, Essentiall Omnipresence, Omniscience, Omnipotency, Wisedome, and Immutability of the Essence of God; as also concerning the Creation, the Providence of God, the Hypostaticall Union of two natures in Christ, the full and perfect Satisfaction performed by Christ for our sinnes, the Iustification of man before God by Faith, and many other Articles particularised, as well by the most high and mighty King of Great Britaine, as by diuers professed Diuines. [...] So that it manifestly appeareth, that his intent was cunningly to make way for the secret instilling of the impious heresies of Socinius and others: and that he, under pretence of inquiring, doeth bestirre himselfe to seduce others.226

It is interesting to find among the signatures confirming the validity of the decrees of the Synod those of the violently anti-Arminian and anti-Socinian Sijbrand Lubbert, theologian at Franeker University, and of Gijsbert Voetius, Gorlaeus’ former fellow-student, who was at the time pastor in Heusden and later professor of the-
ology at Utrecht and a fierce anti-Cartesian polemicist who would for the rest of his life cite Vorstius’ work as one of the worst theological offenses ever committed. Whether Vorstius had been a sly and ambitious arch-heretic or rather a peaceful theologian who unwittingly became the victim of a situation of theological mass hysteria is hard to decide. While his opponents viewed his Socinian sympathies and his political advice to the Dutch political establishment as highly dangerous, the historian of Arminianism, Harrison, writes: “It is impossible not to sympathize with Vorstius. He was not one of the square-browed, pugnacious theologians, who were so plentifully produced at that time and seemed born for the prize-ring.” At any rate, Vorstius left the Netherlands a broken man. Once again, there exist two versions of what happened to him. According to one, he first went into hiding and eventually moved to Friedrichstadt, where he died shortly after his arrival in 1622. According to the other, he became a teacher in Tönningen, and died there. But let us finally return again from Arminius and Vorstius to the subject of our book. It is evident that Gorlaeus witnessed the beginning of the Arminian controversy at Franeker, whose faculty had split already during the early phase of the standoff between Arminius and Gomarus, with its professor of theology, Lubbert, styling himself as the leader of the Frisian anti-Arminians. By enrolling at Leiden’s theological faculty, however, Gorlaeus had now moved to the epicenter of this massive doctrinal earthquake. It goes without saying that it would have been impossible for a theology student not to take sides in the issue. In October 1610, for example, an overwhelming majority of 55 theology students out of 68 signed a submission to the Curators of the University and the States Provincial of Holland and Friesland against Vorstius’ appointment.

It is obvious that no student of theology could have remained agnostic in this matter. And all the evidence we currently have – doctrinal and biographical alike – indicate that Gorlaeus had chosen for the minority current, the Arminians.

3.10. THE LINK BETWEEN VORSTIUS’ De Deo AND GORLAEUS’ Exercitationes

It has already repeatedly been mentioned that thirty years later, in 1641, Gijsbert Voetius located the Exercitationes within this precise context, linking its doctrines to Vorstius’ De Deo and to Taurellus’ ideas. In this section, we aim to verify whether this allegation is true. Irrespective of our verdict on this issue, however, it should be clear that Gorlaeus wrote his two works in the years in which the Vorstius affair peaked; and that he did so at the two university towns at which the Remonstrant and Socinian debates were raging most violently. Whether this atmosphere influenced, or determined, or possibly even motivated Gorlaeus’ work is what we must now examine.
In order to understand the link, suggested in Voetius’ 1641 testimony, between Gorlaeus’ ontological atomism and Vorstius’ *De Deo*, we must first understand what it was that scandalized the anti-Arminians about the work of the German theologian. One of the main two points they attacked was Vorstius’ attempt to find common ground with non-Calvinist Christian sects. His doctrinal flexibility must by the way not necessarily be read as evidence of a deeply felt religious tolerance on his part; it may have been motivated by the observation that the Protestant world was in a state of increasing fragmentation and by an urgent feeling that this process needed to be stopped in the face of mounting counter-reformational pressure. Vorstius’ position on this issue could hardly have been expressed more clearly and forcefully than in his call for a State-enforced *prophetandi libertas*; i.e., a freedom of theological interpretation. In his Introduction to *De Deo*, he moreover expressed the hope that his method and its results would lead to a moderation of the various stand-points and hence to a unification of Protestant churches. The thrust of this argument is comparable to Taurellus’ hope that a commonly acceptable metaphysical basis would allow for the development of a greater doctrinal consensus between the competing theological groups – and in turn to Gorlaeus’ attempt to develop an ontology that could serve also as the basis of a *theosophia*. All of this is directly related to the second general trait of Vorstius’ thought that aroused scandal among his doctrinal foes. Many theologians were taken aback by his use of metaphysics and physics, not only as a means of resolving theological issues, but as an outright instrument of salvation – in the eyes of the predestinarians not only an erroneous but also a clearly futile enterprise. This (meta-)physical approach to theology is probably where Taurellus’ influence on Vorstius is at its clearest; it also sheds light on, and possibly even explains, Gorlaeus’ attempt to enter the debate through the presentation of a worked-out ontology.

Vorstius’ censured doctrines fall roughly into two groups. The first, which will not concern us here, has to do with the (lesser) status of Christ vis-à-vis God; they are the ones that led to the charge of Socinianism and Unitarianism. The second group is related to the problem of predestination. Vorstius’ double premise is that God’s vindictive or punitive justice is not part of his essence, and that it is wrong to define faith as a form of confidence in the forgiveness of sins, for this is not its essence. The implication of this double premise is that the relation between God and humans is much more open than the anti-Arminians permitted; for if it is neither part of God’s essence to punish, nor part of ours to be saved or condemned, it follows that we, in the temporal course of our lives, may be able to contribute to the sentence pronounced on us on the Day of Atonement.

How such a personal effort can be rendered compatible with divine omniscience is of course what needs to be explained. Vorstius’ method for doing so relies on an ontological *Wesensbestimmung* of God, as the title of his embattled book indicates.
In essence, his *Tractatus de Deo* tries to define God’s attributes and to deduce from them that God, despite his eternity, is capable of undergoing changes in time, and notably of changing his mind. Importantly, in changing his mind even God can be led by hopes and fears. Such actual changes of mind are mentioned in the Bible, whenever we read of God passing new laws. The most notable such case is the New Testament, which demands greater perfection of the faithful than the Old Testament.

The upshot of this temporalization of God’s actions is that it allows for an interaction between him and humans, and hence for a weakening of the dire logic of predestination. Vorstius’ conclusions are in this respect compatible with Jacob Arminius’ position: God’s decisions, for Vorstius, are merely accidents of his being; his will is not unchanging, because it concerns events that are in time; God is spatially separated from what happens, because he is not everywhere present in being, but only through his actions; and for him, eternity is not an indivisible entity, but a mere succession of past, present and future. In fact, God does not know future events in the same way in which he knows past events; he can think one thing after another in the usual manner of a deliberation. For this very reason, it is logically possible that his decrees regarding matters that depend on his free will were not taken at the beginning of all eternity.

Agreeable though many of these views will have been to the more daring exponents of the Remonstrant movement, in the eyes of his opponents, Vorstius committed the crime of physicalizing God, whom he treated like any other *ens*. The English censors, for example, listed as the first of Vorstius’ heresies the following: “God is not essentially immense, nor simply infinite; but he is a quantum, finite, in a place, in some way corporeal, and almost consisting of matter and form.”

Now, is this not exactly the premise of Gorlaeus’ ontology? Apart from the fact that he rejects the Aristotelian matter-form distinction, is this not precisely how he views God, as a chief representative of the category of *ens per se*?

But there is more. Vorstius’ opponents also took exception to his conviction that a rational definition of God could provide a basis of faith and could constitute an instrument of salvation. Faith – they insisted – could not be acquired, any more than salvation. By contrast, Vorstius maintained that reason and understanding could work as instruments of faith, arguing that we may gain insight into God’s nature not only through revelation, but also through

those first and most general principles of a healthy philosophy, which hold no less true in the case of God than they do indubitably hold in general for all other beings, or substances, or spirits, as far as they are based on unchanging foundations.
The closeness of these positions to the premises of Gorlaeus’ *Exercitationes* is evident. We recall the latter’s definition of philosophy as the “naked knowledge of beings”; his understanding of the *ens per accidens* as a category that includes both God and created things; and his belief that this knowledge of *entia* can provide us with essential knowledge about God and thereby help us perfect our souls. The Vorstian nature of his project is equally evident in his subdivision of his ontological *prima philosophia* into three branches, namely *physica*, *angelographia* and *theosophia*; the latter being defined as the investigation of “the nature and attributes of God” (*de Dei natura et eius attributis*). But *De natura et attributis Dei* also happens to be the subtitle of Vorstius’ controversial *Tractatus de Deo*. Although both this theme and the respective description were common, it would have been impossible in the years 1610-1612 not to associated them immediately with the title of Vorstius’ book.

At least in the *Exercitationes*, Gorlaeus’ intention seems evident. It is to provide the ontological framework from which the truth of Vorstius’ specific type of *theosophia* would logically follow. Given that, in the years 1610-1611, he still lacked the theological training and hence the authority to carry out the logical consequences of this ontology for the realm of *theosophia* itself, he limited himself to the parallel case of *physica*, for which his Franeker diploma fully qualified him. In other words, we may conclude that Gorlaeus tried to compose the most ambitious *apologia* possible for the embattled theologian he supported. This tentative conclusion has the advantage of explaining why Gorlaeus decided to leave his *Idea physicae* unpublished and to write his much more ambitious *Exercitationes*, in which his physics would now only feature as the product of an overarching metaphysical synthesis. It might in fact have been Gorlaeus’ intention to bring in theology more clearly and prominently in his treatment of the soul. But while he was writing that part of his work, his own soul took to the heavens.

### 3.11. Nicolaus Taurellus’ Influence on Vorstius and Gorlaeus

It seems that we have now found a possible explanation for why Gorlaeus may have decided to expand his physical ideas into his more ambitious *Exercitationes* at the height of the battle over Vorstius’ theological positions. A comparison of his divine *ens per se* with Vorstius’ physicalized God certainly yields a powerful clue as to the genesis and motivation of his ontology. Nevertheless, our puzzle is still not completely solved. We have been specifically looking for the sources of Gorlaeus’ atomist convictions. Vorstius’ ontology, despite its general concern with the physical interactions between the divine *ens* and the created *entia*, does not rely on any atomist notions.
In order to insert the last piece into our intellectual portrait, we must turn to Nicolaus Taurellus, the author from whom, once again according to Gijsbert Voetius, Gorlaeus had borrowed his doctrine of man as an *ens per accidens*.\(^{239}\) We recall from above that Voetius mentioned that in 1610, the Heidelberg theologians had sent an evaluation of Vorstius’ *Tractatus de Deo* to the Synod of Holland, in which they had established a connection between Taurellus and Vorstius. Let us therefore look at the relevant passage in the Heidelberg report. There, it is stated that Vorstius does not hesitate to shake up the doctrine of older and more recent theologians, and he only likes what monstrosities he can find in the gaps of Duns Scotus and in that atheist physician Taurellus: that in his essence, God is a *quantum*, big, finite, composed of essence and accidents, changeable through his will, liable to passive obedience, and three hundred similar things.\(^{240}\)

We can see that the Heidelberg theologians attributed Vorstius’ much-condemned attempts to physicalize God to Taurellus’ bad influence. But who was this ‘atheist physician’?

Nicolaus Taurellus (Monbéliard, 1547-Nuremberg, 1606), whose name is the Latinized form of Öchslein, studied at Tübingen under Jacob Schegk, to whose independent mode of philosophizing he was to remain attached for the rest of his life.\(^{241}\) After becoming *magister artium* in 1565, he turned to theology but left this discipline soon for medicine, which he studied in Basel. After becoming *doctor medicinae* in 1570, he obtained a teaching position there as Theodor Zwinger’s successor in the chair of ethics. In 1580, he moved to Nuremberg’s newly founded University of Altdorf, where he occupied a chair in medicine and natural philosophy until his death in 1606.\(^{242}\) While Taurellus called himself “professor of Aristotelian philosophy and of Galenic medicine,” and published extensively on medical and physical matters, he preferred the title of “Christian philosopher,” for throughout his life his true ambition remained the reform of philosophy in such a way that it would suit the needs of Protestant theology.\(^{243}\)

As he was to recall in bitter autobiographical accounts, he had not left theology for medicine because of any lack of interest, but because he had been repelled by the continuous doctrinal bickering among Protestant theologians and because he was shocked by the customary use made of double-truth arguments, according to which certain statements were clearly false in theology but could be accepted as true in philosophy. Throughout his life, Taurellus not only insisted that truth was one and indivisible, but his most ambitious works were dedicated to the development of a first philosophy that was to provide both philosophers and theologians with first principles and reconcile the Protestant sects. The title of his “Survey of
Aristotelian Metaphysics Emended and Completed According to the Norms of the Christian Religion” signals this objective in a nutshell. That at least some important contemporaries applauded this effort can be gathered from a letter by Rudolph Goclenius, which is prefaced to Taurellus’ *De rerum aeternitate* (1604) and which praises both the latter’s rejection of the double-truth theory and his concomitant rejection of Aristotle’s metaphysics and natural philosophy.

The grand ambitions of this “first Lutheran metaphysician,” as Ulrich Leinsle calls Taurellus, expressed themselves at the precocious age of twenty in a bold set of *Theses de philosophia*. These theses were, in a thoroughly modified way, integrated into the large and extravagant *Philosophiae triumphus* (1573), which (in translation) carries the following lengthy and programmatic title:

The Triumph of Philosophy, that is, a metaphysical method of philosophizing, in which human reasons are thus deduced from divinely instilled ideas that through most solidly constructed demonstrations the truth of the matter will openly shine forth, and Philosophy will burst forth victorious, after having been buried for a long time through the authority of the philosophers. In six hundred questions [on issues] in which Philosophy used to appear to be battling with our revealed truth, but is now reconciled with it, in such a way that she must not only be said to serve faith, but provide its foundation.

It is in this treatise that we encounter the doctrine of man as an *ens per accidens*, which Gorlaeus subsequently adopted into his own philosophy. Why exactly Taurellus insists on the total separability of soul and body is not fully clear and would require in turn a study of the prehistory of his philosophy at the hands of Jacob Schegk. However, a clue might be provided by his desire to attribute the human will exclusively to the soul: “For we are composed of a body and a soul, but the will considered by itself is a simple faculty of the soul, which can understand and exist without the body.”

The *Philosophiae triumphus* represents an intelligent, youthful outburst, comparable in spirit with Gorlaeus’ precocious system. Like the latter, and despite the occasional applause by individual philosophers and theologians, it met with stern opposition in most quarters. This helps explain why Taurellus, for about twenty years, remained silent on the issue of metaphysics, while in the interval publishing widely on medicine, natural philosophy and emblems. Still, the replacement of Aristotle’s metaphysics remained his secret passion. As Zedler’s *Universal-Lexicon* explains in a disarmingly charming phrase, his unwillingness to accept the old metaphysics had to do with the fact that “he could not make Aristotle’s doctrine of God, of the intelligences, of providence, and of the soul rhyme [i.e., agree] in any way with the principles of Christian religion.”
He shared this aversion to Aristotelian metaphysics with Peter Ramus, but, like Gorlaeus after him, he felt that the solution was not to be sought in dialectics, but in a new ontology. Taurellus had no problem with metaphysics as a discipline; the problem was rather that Aristotelian metaphysics effectively blocked the road to a true knowledge of God. In his eyes, philosophy left to its own devices led to despair, while faith by itself was blind; both were not only in need of each other, but also of a metaphysical ‘first philosophy’, which could assist them by providing first principles. Like Vorstius and Gorlaeus after him, Taurellus was convinced that a metaphysical definition of being in general, and of God’s being in particular, was essential in matters of faith and religion, because it could help us in understanding God and in settling thorny theological questions. An intellectual cognition of God was essential because “who does not know God, will not believe in Christ!” Importantly, ‘knowing’ for him did not mean any direct acquaintance, but ‘ratio-cination.’

It is obvious that, very much like Gorlaeus’ prima philosophia, Taurellus’ metaphysica universalis had as its goal the discovery, definition, and demonstration of the qualities of being inasmuch as they were shared by all entia. Given that it dealt with ‘being as being’ (ens ut ens), this universal metaphysics had to precede all other sciences, including theology.

Having introduced Taurellus, let us now return to the Heidelberg theologians’ claim (of 1610) that Vorstius’ Tractatus de Deo was influenced by this philosopher and physician, and to Voetius’ later allegation (of 1641) that Gorlaeus too followed the atheist doctrines of that German philosopher. As to the first link, the extent to which the Heidelberg theologians were correct in discerning in Vorstius’ Tractatus de Deo the footprints of Taurellus’ philosophy is hard to gauge, because although Taurellus is repeatedly cited, his name features far less prominently than those of other authors. It would, for example, be interesting to investigate whether the theologian who most influenced the thought and program of Vorstius’ metaphysics and theology was not Girolamo Zanchi (1516-1590). At any rate, Vorstius explicitly mentions as his model Zanchi, who was, like Martin Luther, an Augustinian Hermit turned Protestant. Zanchi, like Vorstius, was animated by ‘latitudinarian’ ideas, and he had also thought that a good way of settling theological disputes was by defining “the nature of God and the divine attributes.” Like Vorstius a few decades later, he too had been attacked for ‘physicalizing’ God and for causing problems for the Calvinist doctrine of justification. However, in contrast to Vorstius, Zanchi had possessed enough good sense to decline the offer of a Leiden chair in theology. More important than these biographical parallels are, however, the strong overlaps between Zanchi’s and Vorstius’ respective lists of censured tenets.

As the investigation of the undoubtedly rich background of Vorstius’ theology
is not our central concern here, we may limit ourselves to the observation that 
Taurellus and Vorstius share a sufficient number of convictions to explain why the 
Heidelberg theologians may have perceived them in some manner as allies. Both 
believed in the rational accessibility of the nature of God and of his attributes, and 
they both treated God as an *ens* possessing a specific quantity. It is also compre-
prehensible why Taurellus’ bold and fascinating *Triumph of Philosophy* might have had 
a general allure for Vorstius, as it defends man’s free will, speaks out against the 
doctrine of predestination and inveighs against theologians who believe that we, 
as humans, are merely passive subjects of God’s inscrutable decisions – although 
of course these positions of Taurellus’ (and hence Vorstius’, to the degree that 
he followed them) went far beyond anything that either Arminius or the early 
Remonstrants had ever maintained.258 On the other hand, the aggressive *Histoi-
ria crypto-Socianismi Altorfinae quondam Academiae infesti arcana*, in which the 
heretical connections between the University of Altdorf (where Taurellus taught) 
westward to Vorstius and eastward to the Polish Socinians are “uncovered” and 
in which one would expect a confirmation of the claims made by the Heidelberg 
theologians, remains totally silent on this score.259 Nor do the very few existing 
studies on Taurellus explain why the Heidelberg theologians may have reached the 
conclusion that there was a particularly strong connection between the views of 
the two authors.260

While an exact determination of the nature of this intellectual debt will have to 
wait until a patient historian of theology decides to tackle this issue, it is an incon-
testable historical fact that once the Heidelberg theologians had established such a 
link between Vorstius and Taurellus, everyone else followed suit, not only repeat-
ing the original charge but adding further incriminating evidence. The English 
censors, for example, attributed a number of Vorstius’ heretical views to Taurellus’ 
influence; notably the following: that God could be treated “in the predicament 
of substance,” that he possessed not only an essence, but “also accidents” and that 
he was “somehow limited.”261

But this process of guilt by association also worked the other way round. If 
Taurellus was an intellectual enemy of the anti-Remonstrants, he had obviously to 
be an ally of the Remonstrants! The logic by which one’s enemy’s enemy is one’s 
friend presumably explains the otherwise inexplicable second edition of Taurellus’ 
*Philosophiae triumphus* in 1617 – in Arnhem, of all places. We have seen above that 
the person responsible for this edition was most likely Gorlaeus’ friend Engelbert 
Egidius.262

It seems evident that our young friend Gorlaeus followed the same reasoning. 
We have heard above that Taurellus had already been mentioned in De Veno’s 
Franeker lectures, although never in a particularly prominent way. But we may 
assume that when Gorlaeus learned that this philosopher was the *malin génie* be-
hind Vorstius’ theology (about which he must have heard a lot given the presence of several of Vorstius’ students at Franeker), he must have tried to get his hands on Taurellus’ works. We have specifically suggested above that his friend Engelbert Egidius, whose *Album amicorum* he signed in 1610, may have played a role in the Taurellian turn of his philosophy.

Whatever the exact circumstances may have been, Voetius was certainly right in stating that Taurellus’ work exercised a direct influence on Gorlaeus’ views. It is very plausible to assume that the latter’s plan of going beyond the physics of his *Idea physices* and of constructing an ontology from which to derive theology and philosophy alike was due to Taurellus’ *Philosophiae triumphus*.

It is furthermore tempting to view Taurellus’ ontology with its atomist implications as the main force behind Gorlaeus’ redefinition of Scaliger’s minimism in terms of a fully-fledged atomist ontology. Taurellus’ ontology generally sheds much light on Gorlaeus’ intellectual endeavor. Like the latter, for example, he explains *ens* as a form of the verb *esse* (‘to be’), concluding from this that *ens* can only mean ‘that which is’, and that *esse* and *existere* must therefore be the same. But if, by definition, each *ens* must necessarily exist, Aristotle’s characterization of being (*ousía*) has to be just as wrong as the attribution of being to the act and the form of a thing. Nor can there exist such merely potential beings as the prime matter of Aristotelian physics; either prime matter exists *in actu*, or it is no *ens* at all. The next step in the argument states that *esse* is synonymous with being an *ens unum*.²⁶³ Leinsle convincingly argues that by viewing *esse*, *ens* and *essentia* as different only from a grammatical point of view, Taurellus embraces “a nominalist position that is directly opposed to the Thomistic view.”²⁶⁴ But from there, Taurellus takes a further step that is even more relevant for our purposes. If ‘oneness’ and ‘being’ are convertible terms, so he argues, then we must conclude that a plurality of *entia* can never merge into a single new *ens*.²⁶⁵ But this is of course precisely the point of departure for Gorlaeus’ own distinction between the atomic *ens per se* and the composite *ens per accidentem*. That the *Philosophiae triumphus* is the source of this distinction seems obvious, as it rejects the traditional definition of *ens per accidens* as something that ‘is’ thanks to the essence of something else, and redefines the term as meaning something that is made up of various essentially unchanged and unchangeable *entia*. Gorlaeus not only adopts this new definition, but, as we have had occasion to see earlier on, also accepts Taurellus’ daring conclusion that man must be viewed as just such an *ens per accidens*.

It would not be difficult to list dozens of further traces of Taurellus’ *Philosophiae triumphus* in Gorlaeus’ *Exercitationes*. Both works, for example, share a dislike for the *ex nihilo nihil* axiom.²⁶⁶ They equally insist that as all beings exist *in actu*, there is no space for any potency. They both claim that all being, *qua* being, must possess ‘quantity’ in the sense of having extension and that God too is a *quantum*
– the latter claim being one of those chastised as ‘atheistic’ by the critics of both Taurellus and Vorstius. In fact, even Gorlaeus’ conspicuous ‘God criterion’ is already in full force in Taurellus: whatever is true of any ens in general must also be predicatable of God, who after all is the ens entium. Indeed, this ‘God criterion’ in a way constitutes the very core of this theological enterprise: for Taurellus (and for Vorstius, who would busily apply the same idea), to define God ontologically as an ens meant to possess an instrument with which to settle disputes concerning such thorny issues as God’s ubiquity, prescience or his ability to change his mind. To treat God as a determinate quantity meant, for example, to be able to localize the divine essence and to separate it from terrestrial events, from the consecrated Eucharist or from the actions of men.

Indeed, as Leinsle has put it, Taurellus’ “ontology is a theory of existing things and of nothing else.” As such, it clearly entails an atomist ontology. The latter necessarily follows from a system according to which (i) all entia are actually existing and numerically unique; (ii) all compounds that result from them are mere composita, or entia per accidens; and (iii) all natural entities, including prime matter, are fully actualized substances.

For this reason, the simplest and most convincing conceptual explanation that we can offer for the genesis of Gorlaeus’ ontology is simply this: as he acquainted himself with Taurellus’ metaphysics, he must have persuaded himself that in the realm of natural philosophy, he had to transform Scaliger’s corpuscular minima into proper atoms, and that the latter had to be derived from, and proven by, a theory of being in general.

But here, a curious question emerges. Was Taurellus himself an atomist in the manner of Gorlaeus? Our answer must be a somewhat hesitant ‘yes’; for admittedly, we do not find in any of his extant works a clear exposition of physical atomism. But various bits and pieces, when added up, convey a fairly clear atomist picture. His metaphysics of existing units, for example, excludes the divisibility ad infinitum that Aristotle demands of all extended magnitudes, which is why Taurellus writes against the Peripatetics:

The infinite must be sought in number and magnitude. But in the number, it is ‘the one’. What about magnitude? There, we have the atom, the point, the indivisibles of motion, the ‘now’. To say that all quantity is divisible is an impudent postulate […] .

Sadly for us, Taurellus refers for his complete proof of the existence of atoms to two works that were either never published or are no longer extant, namely to his commentaries on Hippocrates’ De natura hominis and on Aristotle’s De lineis inscetilibus; the latter book was even announced in the catalogue of the Leipzig autumn
book fair of 1597.\textsuperscript{271} In his extant works, by contrast, he treats atoms as if their existence were almost too obvious to require a proof. Given their date of publication, and the scarcity of contemporary philosophers who postulated the existence of physical indivisibles, Taurellus’ nonchalance is of course rather surprising.

Unless his ‘lost’ works resurface, we must remain content with mere hints. There is, for example, the rebuttal of the Aristotelian argument that the indivisible cannot possibly have a size. Taurellus observes that quantum and diairetón (‘divisible’) are two separate and independent notions. Being a part of the essence of all being, quantum cannot be denied even to the smallest entity. “It is true that atoms are the principles of magnitude,” Taurellus states quite casually in his Kosmologia, and that everything “is composed out of first, minimal and individual parts.”\textsuperscript{272}

When these ‘individual parts’ touch each other, they do not become continuous but remain merely contiguous, without merging into a single unity.\textsuperscript{273} As for the issue of mixture, his Philosophiae triumphus defines it in terms of a mere compositio of elements.\textsuperscript{274} It may be worth adding here that in his later works, Taurellus also subscribes to Cardano’s theory that natural bodies are exclusively composed of earth and water and that mixture occurs under the influence of celestial heat.\textsuperscript{275}

Further atomistic explanations are found in his commentary on Arnaldus de Villanova’s Opera omnia. There he denies that there is such a thing as prime matter, arguing that “it is the common opinion of physicians that there exists nothing prior to, and more simple than, the elements.”\textsuperscript{276} The limit of divisibility of these elements is not given by any substantial form but by the existence of atoms. This passing reference is highly relevant, for it shows that, like Gorlaeus after him, Taurellus substituted the concept of a natural minimum (which is defined as the lower existential limit of a substantial form) with that of an atom (which designates the absolute size of the basic unit of a substance).\textsuperscript{277}

In other passages, however, Taurellus takes his distances from the ancient atomists.\textsuperscript{278} This is in fact the last point that must be emphasized here: Taurellus’ theologically motivated ontology did indeed entail a doctrine of atomized matter. But both the provenance and the larger aims of this atomism were such that it owed next to nothing to the views attributed to Democritus, Leucippus, Epicurus or Lucretius. Although Taurellus felt that he had to respond to Aristotle’s objections to atomism, one can see that it was not his intention to revive the old Democritean model. The premises of this Protestant atomism had indeed little in common with ancient materialism.
3.12. GORLAEUS’ CONTRIBUTION TO PHILOSOPHY

As we have just seen, Taurellus furnishes us with the last important piece to the puzzle constituted by Gorlaeus’ precocious philosophical system. However, no original thinker is the sum of his predecessors; nor can Gorlaeus’ system be deduced from the sum of the views contained in the teaching of De Veno, Scaliger, Vorstius and Taurellus. In fact, only an extraordinarily tidy, coherent and sharp mind could have brought the ideas of such different authors into a new synthesis. This is why Gorlaeus, despite his youth, deserves to obtain a more honorable place in the history of philosophy and science than he has hitherto been granted.

Our knowledge of the circumstances under which the \textit{Excercitationes} and the \textit{Idea physicae} came about certainly do not lessen the respect for the intellectual achievement these two writings represent. At the same time, it obviously influences our interpretation of it. Gorlaeus, as we now know, was not a mature philosopher contemplating physical, chemical and medical evidence, but a self-confident student who responded with his writings to a religious controversy with a number of powerful philosophical notions.

If we resume our findings, we may postulate that Gorlaeus’ exposure to specifically Protestant ways of philosophizing began at the University of Franeker. While any Dutch undergraduate in those days was likely to have to come across a range of non-Aristotelian notions, particularly in the fields of metaphysics and logic, Gorlaeus was lucky enough to learn his trade from the versatile and heterodox Henricus de Veno, who in the field of natural philosophy \textit{(or physica)} combined a scriptural approach with German metaphysics and Italian naturalism. Above, we have traced Gorlaeus’ conviction that all natural bodies are exclusively mixtures of water and earth and that they are mixed through the force of celestial heat back to De Veno and thence to Cardano and the north-Italian commentary literature on \textit{Meteorology} IV. But we have also seen that Gorlaeus goes beyond his teacher by combining this model with the corpuscular explanations he had found in Scaliger’s anti-Cardanian \textit{Exercitationes exotericae}.

Gorlaeus’ fascination with Scaliger’s work cannot only be inferred from numerous doctrinal parallels, but expresses itself more directly: Scaliger is the only modern author quoted and mentioned by name in all of Gorlaeus’ more than 400 pages. However, we have also seen that this admiration is not blind. Gorlaeus’ rejection of Aristotelian hylemorphism and its substitution by a fully developed atomist doctrine mark a clear break with Scaliger, who, after all, had depicted himself as the protector of Aristotle’s eternally valid physics and had concealed his corpuscularian notions under the Peripatetic terminology of \textit{minima naturalia}. To explain the sources of Gorlaeus’ atomist ontology, we have had to look elsewhere. If the arguments presented in this chapter are correct, then his ontology and the
atomism that results from it is not the fruit of Italian medico-philosophical physics, but of German theologico-metaphysical thought.

We have furthermore seen how Gorlaeus, as a beginning student of theology at Leiden University, found himself at the epicenter of the Arminian controversy and the upheaval caused by the appointment of the theologian Conrad Vorstius as Arminius’ successor. Everything we have heard about Gorlaeus – his teacher De Veno, his friend Engelbert Egidius, his roommate Rudolph van Echten, and above all, the doctrinal overlaps with Taurellus and Vorstius – document that he sided with the embattled professor. His propagation, in the *Exercitationes* of a ‘first philosophy’, ontologically defined, as a method for finding the essential properties of all existing things, including God, can in the context of 1611 be interpreted as nothing else but a defense of the guiding idea behind Vorstius’ controversial *Tractatus de Deo*, which had been published in its final form in 1610.

We have heard that one of the charges brought against Vorstius was that he had followed the ‘atheist physician’ Nicolaus Taurellus in applying physical categories to God. The Utrecht theologian Voetius was later to accuse Gorlaeus of having committed the same crime. This charge, we have found, is correct. We have shown that Taurellus’ ontology provides a number of crucial elements for our reconstruction of Gorlaeus’ atomism, for it represents the blueprint of the latter’s equation of ‘being’ with ‘existence’, ‘oneness’ and ‘quantity’ – an identification from which atomism follows as a corollary. Put somewhat crudely, Gorlaeus accepted Taurellus’ atomist ontology and applied it to his Italianate natural philosophy, thereby producing a philosophical and physical system that was remarkably original.

That system, as we shall see in our concluding chapter, was for some decades read, discussed, accepted or refuted at home and abroad, leaving its most visible and intriguing traces notably in the circle of Descartes’ Dutch friends.