

THEOLOGY AND AGENCY IN EARLY MODERN LITERATURE

What can I do? To what degree do we control our own desires, actions, and fate – or not? These questions haunt us, and have done so, in various forms, for thousands of years. Timothy Rosendale explores the problem of human will and action relative to the divine – which Luther himself identified as the central issue of the Reformation – and its manifestations in English literary texts from 1580 to 1680. After an introduction which outlines the broader issues from Sophocles and the Stoics to twentieth-century philosophy, the opening chapter traces the theological history of the agency problem from the New Testament to the seventeenth century. The following chapters address particular aspects of volition and salvation (will, action, struggle, and blame) in the writings of Marlowe, Kyd, Shakespeare, Ford, Herbert, Donne, and Milton, who tackle these problems with an urgency and depth that resonate with parallel concerns today.

TIMOTHY ROSENDALE is Associate Professor of English at Southern Methodist University, Texas. He is the author of *Liturgy and Literature in the Making of Protestant England* (Cambridge University Press, 2007) and numerous articles and essays.

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Timothy Rosendale
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In memoriam
Richard Rosendale
1926–2015
beloved Dad

Ne let the man ascribe it to his skill,
That thorough grace hath gained victory.
If any strength we have, it is to ill,
But all the good is Gods, both power and eke will.

Spenser, *The Faerie Queene* I.x.1

Our wills and fates do so contrary run
That our devices still are overthrown;
Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own.

Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 3.2 (Player King)

Man's goings *are* of the LORD; how can a man then
understand his own way?

Proverbs 20:24

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