

Title: Paul Helm's "Compatibilist" View of Divine Providence in Light of the Frankfurtian Debate

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ABSTRACT

It is easy to find in prominent scholarly opinion today that the Reformed Christian tradition must preclude creaturely freedom (relevant for moral responsibility) because of its strong ties to comprehensive divine determinism. The idea is that it would have to be at best metaphysically compatibilist to affirm some semblance of creaturely freedom. Arguably, one of the two contemporary Reformed scholars who have been most influential in promulgating this perspective is Paul Helm. Interestingly, although Helm's "no-risk" view of divine providence started off as pretty straightforwardly classical compatibilist, it has since then morphed into what is akin to source incompatibilism. At the heart of this transformation is Helm's increasing interest in the feasibility of "*irreducible agency*, despite the fixity of the future" (or to use a more technical lingo, "*actual-sequence-indeterminism*, despite alternate-sequence-compulsion"). It is significant to note that since 1969 the possibility of such "irreducibly voluntary, yet *only one-way choice*" has been rigorously pursued by many able Frankfurtian "new-compatibilists" as well as "source-incompatibilists." The goal of this Frankfurtian project is to object to the Principle of Alternative Possibilities (PAP, for short) by showing that a certain inability to do otherwise need not interfere with one's own meaningful production of voluntary and morally relevant choice (i.e., "even choosing the inevitable could be done morally responsibly"). Through visiting some of the most brilliant paradigmatic cases, I argue that the trajectory of the Frankfurtian project is headed for a complete failure and that this is a further indication of the fact that the relevant ability to do otherwise is indispensable for making a morally relevant free choice. To go back to the technical language again, there is then no such a thing as truly "*actual-sequence-only-indeterminism*," as genuine "*alternate-sequence-compulsion*" does eventually rob the agent of her relevant ultimate moral sourcing capabilities. Given this state of scholarship, those with a similar aspiration for such "*irreducible agency*, despite being strongly Reformed" should then perhaps look for the irreducible alternative within more robustly libertarian bounds. In utilizing Helm's own distinction, I suggest a flexible *type-certainty* model, according to which God is said to ordain everything, but "*everything*" hereby means "every *type* of thing that *God* would ever want to preordain and ensure (without determining all of their particularities so as to render them particular *action-tokens*)." I do this to allow more freedom at the *action-token* level (say, by eliminating at least their time-and-spatial indexing requirements) without actually becoming either Open-Theistic or Semi-Pelagian in my outlook, for that would rob God of too much control to be the truly sovereign God of all (*types* of) things that really matter.