

The Conflict of Divine Control and Human Freedom

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Key definitions:

- Prevolitional decision point: When God made His decision on what to create, just “before” the creative decree.
- Two views on nature of divine control:
 - Risky control: God’s prevolitional knowledge (including how he decides to act) does not uniquely specify an actual world.
 - Risk-free control: Not risky.
- World: maximal state of affairs.
 - Maximal: Either includes or precludes every other state of affairs.
- World segment: world up to some point in time.
- World book: contains all true propositions (for the particular world).
- Free will: “To say that one has free will is to say that when one decides among forks in the road of time (or, more prosaically, when one decides what to do), one is at least sometimes able to take more than one of the forks.”
[Peter van Inwagen, *Metaphysics*, 1993]
- Accounts of human freedom: compatibilism and libertarianism
- Accounts of divine control: compatibilism and Molinism
- Middle Knowledge: God knows (prevolitionally) how every creature would act if placed in any given circumstance.
- Molinism: View of divine control based on middle knowledge
- Logical problem of evil: Evil in the actual world is logically incompatible with the existence of God (omniscient, omnipotent, wholly good).
- Free-will defense: A solution to the logical problem of evil based on human freedom.

Some quotes illustrating compatibilist freedom:

Feinberg:

“God can decree all things and yet we can still act freely in the compatibilist’s sense of freedom. God can guarantee that his goals will be accomplished freely even when someone does not want to do the act, because the decree includes not only God’s chosen ends but also the means to such ends. Such means include whatever circumstances and factors are necessary to convince an individual (without constraint) that the act God has decreed is the act she or he wants to do. And, given the sufficient conditions, the person will do the act.”

John S. Feinberg, "God Ordains All Things," in *Predestination & Free Will*, D. Basinger and R. Basinger, eds., InterVarsity Press, 1986.

Tiessen on Helm:

He [Feinberg] also [i.e., in addition to John Frame] takes a soft determinist or compatibilist position, which differs from hard determinist positions, some of which might be fatalistic, that is they would argue that God had no choice in what he did.

In distinction from the 'absolute necessity' of the fatalist model, Feinberg posits 'consequent necessity,' which holds that 'once certain choices are made (by God or whomever) certain things follow as a consequence. But before these choices are made, no inherent necessity dictates what must be chosen.' An action is defined as 'free' even if it is causally determined so long as the causes are nonconstraining. On this reading, God's decree includes 'whatever circumstances and factors are necessary to convince an individual (without constraint) that the act God decreed is the act she or he wants to do. And, given the sufficient conditions, the person will do the act.' (245–246)

Paul Helm maintains that God's omnicausality would be fatalistic 'only if God decreed ends without decreeing any or all of the means to those ends, or if God's will was itself fated.' But God ordains means as well as ends and employs our causal powers so that their voluntariness and spontaneity as well as our responsibility are not overridden.

Terrance Tiessen, *Providence & Prayer*, InterVarsity Press, 2000, p. 237

Tiessen's own model:

"This ... model ... affirms the main features of the Calvinist model. God is comprehensively in control in the world, accomplishing purposes that he has determined in eternity. Because his will is always accomplished, it is evident that God's creatures (human and angelic) do not have libertarian freedom. This is a compatibilist model that affirms both meticulous providence and human freedom of a spontaneous or voluntary kind. ... God not only knows that actual future, he has determined that future. But in order to do this, God needed to know how creatures would respond to situations, including their response to his own persuasions or actions. God can know this because creatures are not libertarianly free and he must know this in order to plan how he will act to bring about his purposes."

Terrance Tiessen, *Providence & Prayer*, InterVarsity Press, 2000, p. 289.