The Fall Has a Date: Why Preciado's Symmetric Semi-Compatibilism Collapses into Fatalism

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Abstract

Michael Patrick Preciado's *A Reformed View of Freedom* asks whether the account of moral responsibility that John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza call guidance control is compatible with Reformed theology, and answers that it is. On two points I think he is right: responsibility does not require that the agent be the ultimate source of what he does, and it does not require, in every case, that he could have done otherwise. I part from him because he applies guidance control to the decree uniformly, so that the decree is the reason no agent could ever have done otherwise, without distinction of the states of man. I call that a symmetric account. It collapses Adam's contingency into God's and so into theological fatalism. By inference it lays the first sin at the door of God. It leaves the race's guilt with no free act to trace to, and it flattens redemptive history by erasing the Fall as an epoch. The remedy is an asymmetric account, in which the mode of freedom is constant and its range changes at the Fall. Adam in innocence had limited ultimate freedom with regulative and guidance control. After the Fall the will is free by guidance control and bound toward God, and its guilt traces to the head of the race. The decree secures every event and replaces no creature's will as its cause. The Fall has a date, and a Reformed account of freedom should say so.

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1. Introduction

Michael Patrick Preciado's *A Reformed View of Freedom* asks whether the account of moral responsibility that John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza call guidance control is compatible with Reformed theology, and answers that it is.[1] His case is careful, and on two points I think it is right. Responsibility does not require that an agent be the ultimate source of his act, and it does not require, in every case, that he could have done otherwise. I accept both, and I say so before I say where I part.

The parting is this. Preciado applies guidance control to the decree uniformly. The decree is the reason no agent could ever have done otherwise, and the rule is stated of Reformed theology without distinction of the states of man. I will call that a symmetric account: one model of freedom, applied the same way in innocence, in sin, in grace and in glory, with the decree as the reason the alternative is absent. My claim is that the symmetric account misses the mark. Applied to the decree in that way, it collapses into theological fatalism, it makes God the author of sin, and it flattens redemptive history by erasing the Fall as an epoch. The remedy is an asymmetric account, in which the mode of freedom is constant and its range changes at the Fall.

I do not claim that the argument is a proof that Preciado's book is impossible. Each step below is an inference from a premise he is reported as holding, together with a premise I take from Scripture and the Confession. A reply has to deny one of the premises, and I try to say in each case which one it would have to deny.[2]

2. Preciado Stated Fairly

Preciado states his position plainly: Reformed theology, on his reading, is theological determinism, and it is compatibilism or semi-compatibilism.[3] He holds that guidance control and Reformed theology agree on four points, which I have elsewhere called four dials. Guidance control "denies the sourcehood condition": an agent need not be "the ultimate source of his actions in order to be free and morally responsible." It "denies the alternative possibilities condition": it is not necessary that an agent "have access to alternative possibilities in the actual sequence." Both are reasons-responsive theories. And both have a similar subjectivist condition on the agent's view of himself.[4]

On the second point he gives the reason the Reformed deny the condition: "It is not the case that an agent has the ability to do otherwise than what God has decreed, foreknew and controls by his providence. God's decree, foreknowledge and providence cannot be thwarted."[5] The decree does

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[1] Michael Patrick Preciado, *A Reformed View of Freedom: The Compatibility of Guidance Control and Reformed Theology*, foreword by Paul Helm (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2019). Pickwick Publications is an imprint of Wipf and Stock. Unless the page is given, I cite his words as they are quoted in the works named in each note.

[2] On the limits of the claim, see Gerald Milton Smith, Jr., *God's Knowledge within the Decree: A Proposed Solution to the Quarrel between Divine Determinism and Libertarian Freedom* (unpublished manuscript, October 2026), §1.6, where the compatibilist and the libertarian are called wrongheaded, not provably wrong.

[3] See Preciado, *Reformed View of Freedom*, Introduction.

[4] Preciado, *Reformed View of Freedom*, Introduction, quoted in Smith, *God's Knowledge within the Decree*, 43–44. The same four points are in the abstract of his 2017 Aberdeen thesis.

[5] Preciado, *Reformed View of Freedom*, Introduction, quoted in Smith, *God's Knowledge within the Decree*, 43–44.

the work in that sentence. It is the reason the alternative is absent. The rule is not indexed to an epoch. It is not confined to the fallen will toward the spiritual good. It is the reason the alternative-possibilities condition fails for the agent as such, and that is the premise the objections below use.

He does not hang the whole position on Frankfurt-style cases. His appendix says that if the cases failed, this "would not dampen the adequacy" of the Fischer–Ravizza account, since the cases are not the only way to show that the principle of alternate possibilities is unnecessary.[6] He treats the older Reformed doctrine of rational spontaneity as a primitive form of the reasons-responsiveness guidance control requires.[7]

What he gets right should be stated at full strength. Frankfurt's principle of alternate possibilities is not necessary for responsibility, and his replacement is true: "a person is not morally responsible for what he has done if he did it only because he could not have done otherwise."[8] The fallen man does not sin only because he cannot do otherwise. He sins because he wants to, and his inability is the condition of that wanting. The denial of sourcehood can be pressed further than Preciado presses it. If desert required that the agent be the ultimate source of what makes him answerable, the requirement could not stop at the moment of choice. It would reach his nature, his history, his being made and his being kept in being. The demand for ultimate sourcehood, taken at full strength, is a demand for aseity, and only God has that.[9] Guidance control, where it is present, is a true description of the control responsibility requires. The will in glory shows that a creature may be free and praiseworthy without the power to do otherwise, for the Confession says it is made "perfectly and immutably free to good alone."[10]

One fairness guard must stand before any objection. Fischer and Ravizza are not fatalists. Fatalism says that outcomes come about whatever the agent deliberates, desires or intends. Fischer and Ravizza insist that the agent's deliberation is causally efficacious, that the actual sequence runs through the agent's own reasons-responsive mechanism and not around it, and that an agent whose rational faculties were bypassed would lack responsibility. In their secular setting the determining factors are impersonal laws and prior states, and they argue that determinism of that kind does not imply fatalism.[11] Nor is Preciado a fatalist in that crude sense. The charge in what follows concerns the theological import alone. When the determining factor is no longer impersonal law but a personal God who decrees both the mechanism and its exact output across all time, Eden included, and the decree is given as the reason no alternative was ever open, the uniform application of their view to the decree collapses into fatalism. That is not what Fischer and Ravizza intended. It is what follows when their machinery is carried symmetrically into the doctrine of God.

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[6] Preciado, *Reformed View of Freedom*, 221.

[7] See Preciado, *Reformed View of Freedom*, as reported in Smith, *God's Knowledge within the Decree*, 43–44; and Richard A. Muller, "Reformed Thought on Freedom vs. Compatibilism: In Response to Preciado," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 19, no. 3 (2025): 209–31.

[8] Harry G. Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," *Journal of Philosophy* 66, no. 23 (1969): 838.

[9] Smith, *God's Knowledge within the Decree*, §1.5.

[10] Westminster Confession of Faith 9.5.

[11] See John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control: A Theory of Moral Responsibility* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), where semi-compatibilism is distinguished from fatalism and guidance control is built on moderate reasons-responsiveness and mechanism ownership.

3. The Tradition as Preciado Draws It

Before the objections, one feature of how Preciado defines the tradition bears on the remedy. In the chapter on decree, foreknowledge and providence, he says that it is not his purpose to give a detailed history of Reformed theology: "Instead, I intend to identify a brief trajectory from the Reformation to the formation of its authoritative creeds and confessions. Once this is done, we can better identify reformed theological teaching on decree, providence, and foreknowledge."[12] He then adopts the periodization of Reformed orthodoxy that names "early orthodoxy (1565–1620), high orthodoxy (1620–1700), a transitional phase influenced by pietism (1700–1740), and, finally, the phase of late orthodoxy or supernaturalism (1740–1800)."[13]

The boundary of the tradition he takes from R. Scott Clark: "By 'confession' I mean narrowly the sixteenth and seventeenth-century Reformed confessions, which we might call the six forms of unity."[14] The six are the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. He adds R. Michael Allen's agreement: "Historically, Reformed theology is best identified by looking to confessions of the Reformed churches."[15] Clark's wider sense, the understanding of those confessions by the theologians "who continued that tradition," is still measured by the six.

In defining the tradition (pp. 62–63), that leaves out the Particular Baptists. It excludes the Second London Confession of 1677 and 1689, which is a recasting of the Westminster Confession and falls inside Preciado's own dates for high orthodoxy, 1620–1700. With the Confession it excludes the men who framed and taught it: Nehemiah Coxe, Benjamin Keach, William Collins, Hanserd Knollys and William Kiffin. I make no claim here about the rest of his book. The point is narrower. The tradition, as he defines it at the place where he sets out to identify Reformed teaching on decree, providence and foreknowledge, has no room for the Baptist witness, and that witness bears directly on the question.

It bears on it in two ways. First, the Second London Confession states the doctrine of the will in a form slightly stronger than Westminster's. God has endued the will of man "with that natural liberty, and power of acting upon choice; that it is neither forced, nor by any necessity of nature determined to do good or evil."[16] The added words, "and power of acting upon choice," name the faculty's power and not only its freedom from compulsion. Adam in innocence "had freedom, and power, to will, and to do that which was good, and well-pleasing to God; but yet was mutable, so that he might fall from it," and he "without any compulsion, did wilfully transgress the Law of their Creation."[17] Keach says of Adam that God "gave him power to stand in that happy Estate, tho he left him in a possibility of Falling to prove his Fidelity and Obedience to his Maker."[18] Power to

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[12] Preciado, *Reformed View of Freedom*, 62.

[13] Preciado, *Reformed View of Freedom*, 63, following Willem van Asselt, "Reformed Orthodoxy," 11, as cited in Preciado, 63 n. 3. In the same note Preciado gives other periodizations from te Velde and from Muller.

[14] R. Scott Clark, *Recovering the Reformed Confessions*, 3, quoted in Preciado, *Reformed View of Freedom*, 63 and n. 4. Clark lists the six as "Belgic Confession [BC], HC [Heidelberg Catechism], Canons of Dort [CD], Westminster Confession of Faith [WCF], Westminster Larger Catechism [WLC] and Westminster Shorter Catechism [WSC]."

[15] R. Michael Allen, *Reformed Theology*, 5, quoted in Preciado, *Reformed View of Freedom*, 63 and n. 5.

[16] Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1677/1689) 9.1.

[17] Second London Baptist Confession 9.2; 6.1.

[18] Benjamin Keach, *The Display of Glorious Grace; or, The Covenant of Peace Opened* (London: S. Bridge, 1698), 11.

stand, and a possibility of falling: that is a two-way will, stated by a leading Particular Baptist without any sense of strain.

Second, the Baptists give an order of the eternal purposes in which the Fall is an epoch. Coxe writes that God, "who from Eternity foresaw the Fall of Man, had also from Eternity a gracious Purpose … to redeem."[19] Keach gives the same order, calls the foreseen fall the "occasion" of the covenant of peace, and calls God's "Love and Mercy" its "grand Motive."[20] He also distinguishes two ways in which things come to pass under the decree: "all things come to pass by his All-wise Providence: According to his Eternal Decree; either by his special Commission, or by his Permission; to say all things come to pass by Gods special Commission, is to make him the author of Sin."[21] I cite the Baptists for the two-way will of Adam, for the distinction between commission and permission, and for the order in which the foreseen fall is the occasion and God's love the motive. I do not cite them for a conditioned knowledge in God. They do not say what kind of foresight they mean.

This is the resource the asymmetric account needs, and it is the one a six-forms boundary leaves out. In the Coxe and Keach order the covenant of redemption is placed after the foreseen fall, and the fall is its occasion, not its cause. That order presupposes that the fall is a real event in a real probation, with a before and an after. A uniform rule has no use for it.

4. First Objection: The Collapse into Fatalism

Take the second dial as stated. The decree is the reason an agent cannot do otherwise than what God has decreed. Apply it to Adam's act and to a later sin. The relation is the same relation. In both, the alternative is absent because the decree, the foreknowledge and the providence cannot be thwarted. Then Adam lacked a real capacity to avoid the fall in the same sense in which the fallen lack a capacity to will the spiritual good.

Ask where, on that rule, the Confession's "possibility of transgressing" lay. Our first parents were created "under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject unto change."[22] Man in innocence had "freedom, and power to will and to do that which was good and well pleasing to God; but yet, mutably, so that he might fall from it."[23] These are claims about Adam. The possibility was not in Adam taken in his own powers, for that is the power the symmetric rule denies. It was not in Adam taken together with the decree, for in that composite sense no one claims an alternative. The only remaining place is God: God could have decreed otherwise. Every contingency in the garden migrates into the divine will. Adam's "might fall" becomes "God might have decreed his fall or his standing," and the creature's mutability becomes a fact about God's options rather than about Adam's will.

That is theological fatalism, and I mean the phrase precisely. In *God's Knowledge within the Decree* I call baptized fatalism the picture in which the decree is the will of God alone, the first link

[19] Nehemiah Coxe, *A Discourse of the Covenants That God Made with Men before the Law* (London: J. D. for Nathaniel Ponder and Benjamin Alsop, 1681), 36–37.
[20] Keach, *Display of Glorious Grace*, 8–10. See also Smith, *God's Knowledge within the Decree*, 105–106.
[21] Benjamin Keach, *God Acknowledged* (London: W. and J. Marshal, 1696), 7.
[22] Westminster Confession of Faith 4.2.
[23] Westminster Confession of Faith 9.2; compare Second London Baptist Confession 9.2.

in a chain that carries every choice to its end, with no contingency left in the creature.[24] The symmetric account does not deny that Adam's choices are causally efficacious, and so it is not fatalism in the crude sense. Deliberation is still efficacious. But its origin and its output are fixed by one personal antecedent will, and once all contingency is located in God and none in the creature, the creature's "could" survives only as his ignorance of what was decreed. Determinism says antecedent conditions are sufficient to necessitate the event. Fatalism says the event will happen no matter what the agent does. If the agent's doing is already settled by the decree in such a way that his power makes no difference to what comes about, the two descriptions meet in the garden.

The tradition refused this move. Turretin says that the same effect is "both necessary and contingent at once," the first "on the part of God and in relation to the decree," the second "on the part of the thing and in relation to the second and proximate causes, which could have been otherwise."[25] Contingency is placed in the second causes, and the second causes "could have been otherwise." The decree, he says, takes away "the liberty of independence" but not "the liberty of spontaneity and indifference," because its necessity is hypothetical only.[26] Thomas Goad, a British delegate at Dort, dismissed as "flim-flam" the view that reduces freedom to doing willingly what God's decree necessitates. God, he said, "ab aeterno, hath ordered that such Agents as he created voluntary, should have a double liberty in their operations, viz. a liberty of contradiction, to do, or not to do … and a liberty of contrariety, to do a thing after this or that manner."[27] Franciscus Junius defined the proper act of free choice as election, which happens "by choosing one of two or more opposites, which is usually called the liberty of contrariety; or, only one thing being proposed, by accepting or rejecting it, and this is the liberty of contradiction."[28]

Richard Muller has pressed the same fault line against Preciado directly. He argues that a necessity of the consequence is implicative, not the causal necessity of the consequent thing, and that early Reformed accounts of free choice do not assume that the will is brought to one effect by a prior created state of affairs.[29] If Muller is right, the symmetric rule converts necessity of the consequence into necessity of the consequent. Necessity propagates from the First Cause into the order of second causes, and the old distinction becomes verbal inside a single necessitating sequence. The Confession's "yet so as" in chapter 3.1, by which the decree neither makes God the author of sin nor takes away the liberty or contingency of second causes, can then be said only by stipulation.[30]

The limit must be stated so the argument is not oversold. Necessity of the consequence can hold in every epoch without this collapse. Given the decree, the act will occur. Turretin says that Adam

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[24] Smith, *God's Knowledge within the Decree*, 7–8; §1.2.

[25] Franciscus Turrettinus, *Institutio theologiae elencticae*, pars prima (Edinburgh: John D. Lowe, 1847), IV.4.6; English adapted from Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., vol. 1 (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992), 321. Unless otherwise noted, translations from the Latin are my own.

[26] Turrettinus, *Institutio*, IV.4.8; English from Turretin, *Institutes*, trans. Giger, 1:321.

[27] Thomas Goad, *Stimulus orthodoxus*, 11–12, as quoted in Richard A. Muller, "Goading the Determinists: Thomas Goad (1576–1638) on Necessity, Contingency and God's Eternal Decree," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 26 (2015): 68.

[28] Franciscus Junius, *Theses theologicae* 22.23, in *Opera* I, col. 2041, as quoted in Muller, "Goading the Determinists," 70 n. 48.

[29] See Muller, "Reformed Thought on Freedom vs. Compatibilism."

[30] Westminster Confession of Faith 3.1.

sinned "necessarily, and freely: the former with respect to the decree and the futurition of the thing; the latter with respect to his will and the manner."[31] The objection is not to that sentence. It is to the further claim that the decree is the reason the capacity was absent, in innocence and after the fall by one rule. That further claim is the second dial.

5. Second Objection: The Authorship of Sin

If the decree is the reason Adam could not but fall, God's determination is the sufficient ground of the first sin. The tradition's defence against the charge that God is the author of sin ran through the deficient cause. Adam acted as a deficient cause, out of a real and mutable capacity. The act is Adam's, the intention is his, the lack is a privation, and concurrence is with the entity and not with the malice. Those marks have somewhere to sit only if the decree secures the futurition of the act and leaves the power. A rule that has already removed the power has nowhere to put them. The deficiency cannot be located within creaturely mutability, because the rule has made mutability idle. By inference, it is pushed back onto the First Cause, who on that rule antecedently designed the mechanism, its inputs and its output.

Louis Le Blanc de Beaulieu saw this. He gave his reason for refusing a premotion to Adam's sin in a single sentence: "we do not see how God would not be the author of sin if He predetermined free causes to acts in themselves vicious and intrinsically evil."[32] Keach drew the same line from the Baptist side: "to say all things come to pass by Gods special Commission, is to make him the author of Sin."[33] The symmetric rule does not say that God commissions sin. But it says that the decree is the reason the creature could not do otherwise, and it says so of the first sin as of every other. Predetermining a free cause to an act in itself vicious is the thing Le Blanc's sentence says cannot be told from authorship. Permission, privation and a deficient cause are not available once the decree has removed the power.

A reply might keep the dial unindexed and deny that antecedent necessity of that kind is authorship. The cost is Le Blanc's sentence and Keach's. A reply might instead say that the decree is permissive with respect to sin. Then the reply has already conceded the point, for a permission that is the reason the creature could not refrain is not a permission in the sense the tradition meant.

6. Third Objection: History Flattened, and No Epoch at the Fall

The Reformed tradition took over from Augustine a description of the will in four states. Turretin gives it in the locus on the state of innocence. The liberty of sinners in the state of sin "is not to be able not to sin." The liberty of believers in grace "is to be able to sin, and not to sin." "But the liberty of Adam was to be able not to sin."[34] He adds the liberty of the blessed, which cannot sin. The Westminster Confession builds its chapter on free will on the same scheme. Fallen man "hath

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[31] Turrettinus, *Institutio*, IV.4.8; English adapted from Turretin, *Institutes*, trans. Giger, 1:321.

[32] Louis Le Blanc de Beaulieu, *Theses theologicae, variis temporibus in Academia Sedanensi editae et ad disputandum propositae* (London: Moses Pitt, 1675), quoted in Smith, *God's Knowledge within the Decree*, 238.

[33] Keach, *God Acknowledged*, 7.

[34] Turrettinus, *Institutio*, VIII.1.9, citing Augustine, *De correptione et gratia*; English from Turretin, *Institutes*, trans. Giger, 1:571.

wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation."[35] The converted man is enabled "freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good," yet "doth also will that which is evil."[36]

The point of this structure is that the range of the will is different in each state, while its mode is the same. In every state the will acts without coercion, as a real second cause, from its own reasons. Adam's will could go either way, and the Confession's word for it, "mutably," means exactly that. The fallen will, toward God, cannot. The regenerate will is freed for the good but not yet whole. The will in glory is free to good alone. A model of freedom that is uniform across the four states cannot be the model the Confession assumes. It needs one that keeps the mode constant and lets the range vary.

Symmetry is one model everywhere. Its three claims are a uniform denial of alternative possibilities without distinction of states, the decree as the reason no agent could have done otherwise, and one model for spiritual and natural acts alike. The framework draws no line between Adam's state and ours, and it could not draw one that mattered, because it gives the decree, not the state of the will, as the reason no agent could have done otherwise. Under that reason the Fall is not an epoch. It is one more decreed act in a sequence of decreed acts, with nothing modal to mark it off from those before and after. The covenant of works goes with it. A covenant that promises life on condition of obedience is a probation only if the condition could be kept and could be broken. On the symmetric rule, Adam could neither keep it nor break it otherwise than he did, in any sense that belongs to Adam. The probation becomes the outworking of a decree that already contained its result as its reason, and the Confession's "possibility of transgressing" becomes a stage direction.

The Fall has a date. Before it, the creature had both regulative and guidance control. After it, by the federal headship of Romans 5, the posterity lose moral ability toward the spiritual good. Natural ability remains, and guidance control remains, but regulative control for that good does not. That inability is the state of the will, the judicial consequence of the headship, not a power the decree had already removed from a faculty that still had it. Regeneration makes the elect willing. It does not restore the dual power of innocence. A history with that shape has an epoch in it, and a uniform rule cannot draw it.

7. Fourth Objection: The Manipulation Argument

Derk Pereboom's four-case argument is the most serious objection to compatibilism in the current literature, and it is aimed at accounts like Fischer and Ravizza's.[37] Professor Plum kills for egoistic reasons, and in each of four cases he meets every condition the compatibilist proposes, reasons-responsiveness included. In the first case neuroscientists manipulate him moment by moment. In the second he was programmed at the start of his life so that his reasoning would produce the act. In the third his community trained him from childhood to the same end. In the fourth the decision comes from his reasoning in the ordinary course of a deterministic world. Pereboom argues that

[35] Westminster Confession of Faith 9.3.

[36] Westminster Confession of Faith 9.4.

[37] See Derk Pereboom, *Living without Free Will* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Pereboom, *Free Will, Agency, and Meaning in Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

there is no principled difference between any case and the next, so that if Plum is not responsible in the first, he is not responsible in the last.

The theological version is worse. Put the decree in place of the neuroscientists. If no agent has the ability to do otherwise than God has decreed, and the decree is the reason, every creature's every act is determined by the comprehensive intention of another agent who designed the agent, his circumstances and his reasoning, with the specific outcome in view. That is not the fourth case, where the determining factors are impersonal. It is the second, with a designer whose intention reaches every act and every reason. Theological determinism of this kind does not soften the manipulation argument. It sharpens it, because the feature that makes the first two cases disturbing, a designing will behind the agent's reasons, is present by definition.

The usual Reformed reply, which I also make, is that a manipulator is a rival cause within the created order who displaces the agent's processes, whereas God is the ground of the order and sustains those processes rather than replacing them.[38] That distinction is real, and it matters for the doctrine of concurrence. But it does not by itself answer Pereboom. His argument does not depend on the manipulator being a cause within nature, or on the agent's processes being bypassed. In the second case nothing is bypassed. What makes Plum non-responsible, on Pereboom's account, is that his act is ultimately produced by factors beyond his control, intended by another. Saying that God is not a rival cause does not deny that. Under the unindexed dial, it restates it at a higher level.

Fischer and Ravizza's own soft-line condition is that the agent must have taken responsibility for his mechanism through a historical process.[39] Preciado's account inherits that condition, and it fails in the theological case for a simple reason: the entire history through which the agent takes responsibility is itself decreed, as the reason it occurs. The hard-line reply, that Plum is responsible even in the first case, remains open. In theology it says that a man is guilty of what God's decree is the reason he could not avoid, and it says so of the first man as of the last. That is the conclusion the Reformed confessions were written to deny. The hard line wins the philosophical point by giving up the theological one.

8. Fifth Objection: Reasons-Responsiveness after the Fall

Guidance control, as Fischer and Ravizza state it, requires that the mechanism issuing in the act be the agent's own and that it be moderately reasons-responsive.[40] Moderate reasons-responsiveness has two parts. The mechanism must be regularly receptive: it recognizes reasons, moral reasons included, in an understandable pattern. And it must be at least weakly reactive: holding the mechanism fixed, there is some possible scenario in which there is sufficient reason to do otherwise, the mechanism operates, and the agent does otherwise for that reason.

Set that beside what the Reformed say of the fallen will. The fallen man is "neither able nor willing to return to God."[41] He "is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself

[38] Smith, *God's Knowledge within the Decree*, §6.6.
[39] Fischer and Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control*, chap. 8.
[40] Fischer and Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control*, chaps. 2–3.
[41] Canons of Dort III/IV.3.

thereunto."[42] "The mind that is set on the flesh … does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot."[43] "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."[44] Take the act at issue, refusing to repent and believe when the gospel is preached. Is there a possible scenario, holding the fallen man's mechanism fixed, in which there is sufficient reason to believe and he believes for that reason? On the Reformed doctrine there is none. The best possible reason has already been given, the call of God in Christ. Regeneration does not count, because it changes the mechanism. So on Fischer and Ravizza's own criteria the fallen man's mechanism is receptive but not even weakly reactive with respect to the spiritual good. Reasons-responsiveness fails exactly where the reasons are strongest and the doctrine is most at stake.

The symmetric account must then choose. If guidance control is what grounds responsibility, and the fallen man lacks it toward God, he is not responsible for his unbelief. That contradicts Scripture: "they are without excuse."[45] If instead he has guidance control over his unbelief, there is some scenario in which, with his mechanism unchanged, he would believe for a sufficient reason. That is a natural ability to believe without regeneration, which the Canons reject.

Fischer and Ravizza allow a way out: responsibility can be traced to an earlier free act, as with the drunk driver who is answerable for what he does when he can no longer control himself. On their own terms, then, the fallen man's responsibility toward God rests on tracing. But tracing requires an earlier act that was free in a stronger sense. The symmetric account has nothing to trace to, because on it Adam's act was as decreed, and as lacking in alternatives, as every act after it. Its tracing ends where Pereboom's argument begins.

9. The Asymmetric Remedy

The account I propose keeps everything Preciado rightly affirms and corrects what the symmetric rule gets wrong. Its centre is the epoch of the Fall.

Before the Fall, Adam had limited ultimate freedom. I call it LUF, and I mean by it a limited, creaturely libertarian freedom (LUF) grounded within the decree, not autonomy from God. It is limited because Adam does not create himself, choose whether to exist, choose the laws of his nature, or stand outside providence. It is libertarian because, in the divided sense, his faculty had a real two-way power: he could have refrained in the same circumstances in which he fell. He had regulative control and guidance control. God's concurrence with his act was "of itself indifferent," and Adam's will gave it direction.[46] God did not premove him. The composite sense is still denied. While the decree that he fall stood, Adam could not refrain with that decree held fixed. The power affirmed is the power of the faculty in its circumstances, not a power to make the decree false, and what the decree secures is the futurition of the act, not the absence of the power.[47]

After the Fall, guidance control is the proper account of the will's control in natural and moral matters. Toward the spiritual good the will is in bondage, and its responsibility toward God is

[42] Westminster Confession of Faith 9.3.
[43] Rom 8:7 (ESV).
[44] John 6:44 (ESV).
[45] Rom 1:20 (ESV).
[46] Le Blanc de Beaulieu, *Theses theologicae*, "De concordia," I, th. LIII.
[47] Smith, *God's Knowledge within the Decree*, 47–48.

traced, through federal headship, to Adam's act, in which the alternative was real: "by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners."[48] The bondage is not a design installed in each man as Plum's programming is installed. It is the will itself. The fallen man is not prevented from a good he wants. He does not want it. His unbelief is his own in the plainest sense, and the asymmetric account can therefore say both things the confessions say: he cannot turn to God, and he is without excuse. Jesus gives the model: "A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit."[49] There is no intervener behind the tree. Its inability is its nature, and its fruit is its own.

God knows what a mutable creature would freely do under a condition by the conditioned knowledge held by a minority of the Reformed orthodox. It is no third kind of knowledge. Ludwig Crocius accepted "the thing itself" and counted it part of God's simple intelligence.[50] The condition always includes God's own will, supposed and not yet decreed: to create, to uphold, to concur and to permit. Franciscus Gomarus said that God regarded the foreseen series of things "not as a cause but as an occasion," and "by a free and wise decree distinctly predefined it."[51] Johann Heinrich Alsted defined the knowledge as that by which God knows "if this should be, that will be future," and denied that God's will is "moved and ordered by the will of the creature."[52] God's understanding comprehends such truths "independently," caused by nothing outside him, "not even by the object."[53] Le Blanc held that the knowledge "in no way fights with grace efficacious of itself."[54] This knowledge reaches only a will that can go either way, which for the spiritual good means Adam's act alone. It has no part in the choice of persons, and it is never applied to grace.

The covenant of redemption is God's only cause and motive in the decree. The creature's would-choice is its occasion, never its cause. Here the Coxe and Keach order does its work. The covenant of redemption, in its redemptive form, follows the foreseen fall, and the fall is its occasion, while God's love and mercy are its motive and his glory its end. The end is first. The Son's having a people to the glory of God would have been served had Adam stood; the covenant of redemption is the form that end took when wisdom chose the fuller route a free Adam's would-choice made available. Adam's freedom determined which routes were available. God's wisdom chose among them. God's purpose alone moved the choice.

God's independence is kept on every side: in being and knowing, for he learns nothing from creatures and his understanding is caused by nothing outside him; in motive, for nothing in the creature moves him; in end; and in grace, for the gifts of salvation are efficacious of themselves. The truths God knows by this knowledge are never grounded apart from God. They have their first ground in God's own understanding and supposed will, and only within that in the nature and circumstances of the creature he conceives.

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[48] Rom 5:19 (ESV); see also Rom 5:18 and Canons of Dort III/IV.2.

[49] Matt 7:18 (ESV).

[50] Ludovicus Crocius, *Syntagma sacrae theologiae quatuor libris adornatum* (Bremen: Bertholdus Villerianus, 1636), III.15, aph. XVII.

[51] Franciscus Gomarus, *Disputationes theologicae*, disp. X, th. XXXV, in *Opera theologica omnia*, 2nd ed. (Amsterdam: Joannes Janssonius, 1664), pars II, 28.

[52] Johann Heinrich Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica* (Hanau: Conrad Eifrid, 1618), sect. I, cap. XXIV, praec. III, 97; cap. XXII, reg. IV, 86.

[53] Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica*, cap. XXI, reg. X, 82.

[54] Le Blanc de Beaulieu, *Theses theologicae*, "De concordia," I, th. LXV.

The decree secures, and the creature causes. The fall is certain by the decree with the necessity of the consequence, and its cause is Adam's will. The fallen man's sin is certain by the decree and caused by his corrupted will. His conversion is certain by the decree and caused by grace that changes the will. In every state the certainty comes from the First Cause and the contingency remains in the second cause. Turretin's double description has both its clauses true: the decree "so determines the futurition of the event that it does not change the nature of things, but lets necessary things act necessarily and free things act freely."[55]

Each objection now meets its answer. The collapse into fatalism is blocked, because contingency in Eden is on Adam's side and not only on God's. The charge of authorship is blocked, because nothing in God settled that Adam ate rather than refrained, and the marks of a deficient cause have a seat. History has its epoch, because the range of the will changes at the Fall by a judicial consequence and not by a uniform rule. The manipulation argument has nothing to grip at the origin, because Adam's act was not ultimately produced by factors beyond his control. And the unbeliever's guilt has something to trace to.

10. Replies to Objections

This is Molinism, or Arminianism. On Adam's act alone the structure is close to Molina's, and I say so. Molina's condition, like mine, includes God's supposed will: God knows what a creature would do "given the hypothesis that He wills to create it in this or that order of things with these or those circumstances, or aids."[56] The difference lies in scope and use. Molina's knowledge reaches every free act, including the adult's cooperation with grace. Mine reaches only a will that can go either way, which excludes the fallen will's response to grace. It is conditioned knowledge within the order of God's own understanding and will, it is never grounded apart from God, and it is the occasion of the decree, never its cause or motive. Election remains by good pleasure, and grace remains efficacious of itself. That is not Arminianism, and the minority who held it were judged orthodox by the strict. Spanheim said the Remonstrant doctrine was "falsely imputed" to them, because they "always suppose an intervening Decree," and Marck judged that they differed from the others "more in phrasing than in substance."[57]

Necessity of the consequence is only verbal. It is verbal only if the decree makes the creature's complete antecedent condition sufficient for the act. The asymmetric account denies that it does. In the divided sense Adam's faculty had power to the contrary; in the composite sense, with the decree held fixed, it did not. The certainty belongs to God's order and the contingency to the creature's, and the two orders are ranked, so that necessity and possibility do not carry from one to the other. Turretin's "indifferent and undetermined in the divided sense, and as to the first act," though not in the composite sense, states the distinction in the tradition's own terms.[58]

Frankfurt cases make alternative possibilities irrelevant. For responsibility, I concede it. Frankfurt cases show that alternate possibilities are not necessary for responsibility. They do not show that

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[55] Turrettinus, *Institutio*, IV.4.6; English adapted from Turretin, *Institutes*, trans. Giger, 1:321.

[56] Luis de Molina, *Concordia liberi arbitrii cum gratiae donis* (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1876), disp. 49, 290.

[57] Friedrich Spanheim the Younger, *Opera*, vol. 3 (Leiden, 1703), and Johannes Marck, both as quoted in Smith, *God's Knowledge within the Decree*, §2.4a.

[58] Turrettinus, *Institutio*, X.3.12; English adapted from Turretin, *Institutes*, trans. Giger, 1:668.

Adam lacked them, and they do not settle the origin of sin. Not necessary for responsibility in every case does not imply never possessed. Adam's alternatives matter for three reasons other than responsibility: the confessions say he was mutable, so that he might fall; a covenant of works whose condition could not be broken otherwise than it was is no probation; and the first sin is Adam's in a way that a decree serving as the reason he could not refrain cannot secure.

The history settles it. It does not, and I do not rest the case on it. The tradition was not uniform. The majority, Voetius and Turretin among them, held premotion and rejected conditioned knowledge before the decree, and some Reformed writers stated freedom in terms close to Preciado's.[59] Muller's criticism is a historical caution and support, not the argument. The argument is that the symmetric rule, applied to the decree, has the three costs stated above, and that the asymmetric account does not.

11. Conclusion

Preciado has given the Reformed a precise vocabulary for something they have always taught: that responsibility does not require ultimate sourcehood, and that a creature can be free without the power to do otherwise, as the saints in glory are. He misses the mark not in what guidance control affirms but in making it the whole and timeless account of Reformed freedom. Making the decree the reason no creature could ever have done otherwise, in every state alike, collapses Adam's contingency into God's and so into theological fatalism. It leaves the first sin without a deficient cause and so, by inference, lays it at the door of God. It leaves the race's guilt with no free act to trace to. And it flattens the history of redemption into a single sequence in which the Fall is no epoch at all.

The remedy is to restore the epoch. Adam in innocence had limited ultimate freedom with regulative and guidance control. After the Fall the will is free by guidance control and bound toward God, and its guilt traces to the head of the race. The decree secures every event and replaces no creature's will as its cause. The covenant of redemption, ordered after the foreseen fall as its occasion, with God's love as its motive and his glory as its end, is the shape that history has. The Particular Baptists confessed it, and a definition of the tradition that leaves them out leaves out the clearest witness to it. The Fall has a date, and a Reformed account of freedom should say so.

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[59] See Muller, "Goading the Determinists," 69, on Ames and Trelcatius.

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