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## 2

# Molinism

*John Martin Fischer*

In the last few decades, much has been written about Luis De Molina's views about God's omniscience and also the relationship between God's omniscience and such ideas as God's providential powers and human freedom and moral responsibility. The literature is enormous, and the issues can be complex. In this paper I do not set myself the (daunting) task of fitting my views into an overall framework that captures the broad sweep of the discussions of the various components of Molinism. Rather, I shall focus on what I take to be the kernel set of ideas in Molina's theory of God's omniscience, and I intend to show that, although they can profitably be employed in seeking to understand God's providence over the world, they (contrary to what many philosophers apparently think) *cannot* be invoked to provide a solution to the problem posed by the relationship between God's omniscience and human freedom. In a nutshell, Molinism does not provide such an answer—it presupposes it.<sup>1</sup> I shall explain why this is so.

### I. FREDDOSO'S MOLINISM

Alfred J. Freddoso's introductory essay to his impressive translation of Luis De Molina's *On Divine Foreknowledge (Part IV of the Concordia)* is an

I benefited from reading a previous version of this paper to the Department of Philosophy at St Louis University I am particularly grateful to comments on that occasion by Eleonore Stump, John Greco, and Scott Ragland. Additionally, I have been helped significantly by thoughtful comments on previous versions of this paper by Michael Rea, Thomas Crisp, Jonathan Kvanvig, Neal A. Tognazzini, and Robert Adams.

<sup>1</sup> I am not the first to note this point. For example, William Hasker says: 'The theory of middle knowledge, in all its historical forms, presupposes the compatibilism of divine foreknowledge and human freedom, so a successful argument for incompatibilism, if one can be mounted, would render superfluous a separate refutation of middle knowledge'

important presentation of (and commentary on) Molina's views, and it has been highly influential in the subsequent evaluation of those views (and their application to the traditional problem of the relationship between an omniscient God and human freedom).<sup>2</sup> It will be helpful initially to follow rather closely Freddoso's presentation of the argument that divine foreknowledge is incompatible with human freedom.<sup>3</sup>

The term 'accidental necessity' (which derives from William of Ockham) refers to a kind of contingent temporal necessity. Things (propositions, states of affairs, and so forth) said to be accidentally necessary at a time are at that time 'fixed' or out of one's control to affect; if a true proposition  $p$  is accidentally necessary at a time  $t$ , then it is out of one's power at  $t$  (and after) so to act that  $p$  would not have been true. Freddoso lays out four principles that pertain to accidental necessity, which he claims are presuppositions of the argument that divine foreknowledge rules out human freedom (in the sense that involves 'freedom to do otherwise'). The first principle is:

(A)  $p$  is accidentally necessary at  $t$  if and only if (i)  $p$  is metaphysically contingent and (ii)  $p$  is true at  $t$  and at every moment after  $t$  in every possible world that shares the same history with our world at  $t$ .<sup>4</sup>

Freddoso points out that (A) entails that accidental necessity is closed under entailment for metaphysically contingent propositions:

(B) If (i)  $p$  entails  $q$  and (ii)  $q$  is metaphysically contingent and (iii)  $p$  is accidentally necessary at  $t$ , then  $q$  is accidentally necessary at  $t$ .<sup>5</sup>

The third principle develops (at least to some extent) an important relationship (mentioned above) between accidental necessity and 'causal power'; Freddoso notes that this principle also appears to follow from (A):

(C) If  $p$  is accidentally necessary at  $t$ , then no agent has the power at or after  $t$  to contribute causally to  $p$ 's not being true.<sup>6</sup>

(Hasker 1989: 18). In a sense I do not go much beyond Hasker's point in this paper, although I hope to develop and explain it in an explicit way.

<sup>2</sup> Freddoso, trans., Molina: 1988.

<sup>3</sup> The argument is presented and discussed in Freddoso 1988: 53–62.

<sup>4</sup> Freddoso 1988: 55.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 1988: 55. Note that this implication presupposes that if  $p$  entails  $q$  and  $p$  is true at  $t$ , then  $q$  is true at  $t$ . Since Freddoso is working with a conception of propositions that allows them to vary in truth value from one moment to another, it would be appropriate for Freddoso to provide a defence of this presupposition.

<sup>6</sup> Freddoso 1988: 55. Evidently, Freddoso is here assuming that 'causally contributing to  $X$ ' entails that  $X$  occurs. One might however wonder whether this is so; perhaps one

The final principle purports to give a sufficient condition for a proposition's being accidentally necessary. Here  $P$  represents the past-tense propositional operator:

(D) If  $p$  is true at  $t$ , then the proposition  $Pp$  is accidentally necessary at every moment after  $t$ .<sup>7</sup>

According to Freddoso, (D) implies that 'once a proposition has been true at a given time, its having been true at that time is from then on necessary and hence, by (C), not subject to any future causal influence.'<sup>8</sup>

Now Freddoso is in a position to articulate a version of the powerful and perennially disturbing argument that God's omniscience is inconsistent with human freedom. Here's the argument, as regimented by Freddoso:

- (1) The proposition *God foreknows, infallibly and with certainty, that Peter will sin at T* is now true. [assumption]
- (2) So at every future moment the proposition *God foreknew, infallibly and with certainty, that Peter would sin at T* will be accidentally necessary. [(1) and (D)]
- (3) But the proposition *God foreknew, infallibly and with certainty, that Peter would sin at T* entails the metaphysically contingent proposition *If T is present, Peter is sinning*. [assumption]
- (4) So at every future moment the proposition *If T is present, Peter is sinning* will be accidentally necessary. [(2), (3) and (B)]

Therefore, no agent will have the power at any future moment to contribute causally to its being the case that the proposition *If T is present, Peter is sinning* is not true. That is, no agent (Peter, God) will have the power at any future moment to make it true that Peter is not sinning when  $T$  is present. [(4) and (C)]<sup>9</sup>

Freddoso contends that Molina's response to the argument is to reject the inference from (2) and (3) to (4) by denying (B), the thesis that accidental necessity is closed under entailment.<sup>10</sup> Further, since (A) entails

can do things that causally contribute to, say, Bush's not being elected, and yet he is elected. (I am indebted to Jonathan Kvanvig for this point.)

<sup>7</sup> Freddoso 1988: 55.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 1988: 55.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 1988: 55.

<sup>10</sup> Freddoso 1988: 58. Freddoso here invokes the following quotation from Molina's Disputation 52, sec. 34: 'Even if (1) the conditional is necessary (because ... these two things cannot both obtain, namely, that God foreknows something to be future and that thing does not turn out that way), and even if (ii) the antecedent is necessary in the sense in question (because it is past-tense and because no shadow of alternation can befall God), nonetheless the consequent can be purely contingent.'

(B), Freddoso points out that insofar as Molina rejects (B), he must also reject (A). Freddoso explains Molina's reasoning as follows:

God's foreknowledge is not a cause of Peter's sinning. To the contrary, it is evident that Peter's sinful act satisfies the necessary condition for indeterministic freedom ... There is, after all, no reason to think that God's foreknowledge makes the sin occur by a necessity of nature or that it is in any way a contemporaneous cause of the sin. Yet it is also true that there is absolutely no power over the past. If God knew from eternity that Peter would deny Christ at *T*, then no agent can now cause it to be true that God never knew this. But if God's past foreknowledge is thus accidentally necessary and entails that Peter will sin at *T*, and if, in addition, Peter's action will satisfy the causal conditions necessary for it to be free, then accidental necessity must not be closed under entailment. Since this conclusion conflicts with (A), it must be the case that (A) does not correctly capture the necessity of the past.<sup>11</sup>

Freddoso goes on to summarize what he takes to be the Molinist's answer to the incompatibilist's argument:

So even though Peter cannot now cause it to be true that God never believed that he would sin at *T*, he nonetheless can now cause something, namely, his not sinning at *T*, such that had it been true from eternity that he would cause it if placed in the relevant circumstances, God would never have believed that he would sin at *T*. And, significantly, the theory of middle knowledge provides an intuitively accessible model on which both parts of this claim come out true.<sup>12</sup>

Freddoso thus points to the doctrine of 'middle knowledge' as a 'significant' component of Molina's response to the incompatibilist's argument insofar as it provides an intuitively accessible model on which the relevant claims come out true. It is important to note here that Freddoso's Molinism involves at least two separate components: the denial of (A) and the doctrine of middle knowledge. Below I shall consider the relationship between these two elements, but it will be useful first to explain the rudiments of the doctrine of middle knowledge.<sup>13</sup>

Of course, Molina's doctrine of middle knowledge is subtle and nuanced, and I am here greatly oversimplifying. I do not believe however that this will be problematic in the present context; for my purposes, all that is relevant are the bare logical bones of the position. Molina presupposes that for an act to be free, the agent must be free to do otherwise, and, further, that the act must not be causally determined by prior events. Additionally, Molina posits what might be called three 'moments' in God's knowledge: (i) His prevolitional (i.e., prior to God's willing to

<sup>11</sup> Freddoso 1988: 58.      <sup>12</sup> Ibid. 1988: 60.

<sup>13</sup> For more careful and comprehensive discussions, see, for example, Freddoso 1998; and Flint 1988.

actualize any particular possible world) ‘natural knowledge’ of metaphysically necessary states of affairs, including the capacities of all possible free creatures, (ii) His prevolitional ‘middle knowledge’ of conditional future contingents (including knowledge of what creatures would *freely* do in all possible circumstances), and (iii) His ‘free knowledge’ of the total causal contribution He himself wills to make to the created world plus what God knows via natural and middle knowledge.<sup>14</sup> As Freddoso puts it:

By (i) He knows which spatio-temporal arrangements of secondary causes are possible and which contingent effects *might* emanate from any such arrangement. By (ii) He knows which contingent effects *would in fact* emanate from any possible spatio-temporal arrangement of secondary causes. By (iii) He knows which secondary causes He wills to create and conserve and how He wills to cooperate with them ... So given His Natural Knowledge, His Middle Knowledge, and His Free Knowledge of His own causal contribution to the created world, He has free knowledge of all absolute future contingents.<sup>15</sup>

Middle knowledge thus stands ‘midway’ between natural knowledge and free knowledge. It consists (in part at least) of a set of (putatively true) conditionals whose antecedents specify circumstances and whose consequences specify how individuals would freely act: ‘In *C1*, Agent *A* would freely do *X*’, ‘In *C2*, Agent *A* would freely do *Y*’, and so forth. As I stated above, Freddoso contends that the doctrine of middle knowledge provides a kind of model for Molinism. How exactly are we to interpret this claim?

Freddoso points out that the Molinist will contend that (say) Peter sins freely at *T*. This is (in part) because nothing causally determines or compels him to sin at *T*. Thus, it appears that Peter could have refrained from sinning at *T*. It follows that Peter could have done something at *T* (refrained from sinning) which is such that, had Peter done it, God would have always known that he would so act (refrain from sinning) at *T*. Peter cannot at *T* initiate a causal chain that flows backwards in time; thus, Peter cannot at *T* causally contribute to God’s knowledge in the past (in the sense of ‘causally contribute’ adopted by Freddoso). But Peter can at *T* so act (refrain from sinning) that God would always have had a different belief about Peter’s behaviour at *T* from the one He actually had. Freddoso presumably believes that this structure of claims is rendered intuitively plausible by the theory of middle knowledge in that God would (prevolitionally) know the relevant conditionals about what Peter would freely do in various circumstances; He could then use this knowledge to

<sup>14</sup> Freddoso 1988: 23.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 1988: 24.

generate the knowledge that (in the relevant alternative possible world) Peter would freely refrain from sinning.<sup>16</sup>

## II. CRITIQUE OF FREDDOSO'S MOLINISM

### II.1a. The theory of middle knowledge

It is crucial to Molinism, as presented by Freddoso, that the following two claims can be true together: Peter can at  $T$  (or just prior to  $T$ ) do other than he actually does, that is, Peter can at  $T$  (or just prior to  $T$ ) refrain from sinning at  $T$  (the 'can-claim'), and 'If Peter were to refrain from sinning at  $T$ , the past (relative to  $T$  or just prior) would have been different from the way it actually was in that God would have had a different belief from the belief He actually had (the 'backtracking conditional' or 'backtracker'). But it is important to recognize that someone inclined toward incompatibilism will point out that the truth of the backtracker calls into question the truth of the can-claim. One can think of it this way: suppose it is a necessary condition of my doing something that the past be different from the way it actually was. Since the past is fixed and out of my control, it at least seems to follow from this that I can't do the thing in question. (Similarly, if it is a necessary condition of my doing something that some law of nature that actually obtains would not have obtained, then apparently I can't do the thing in question; it does not seem that the past is different from the natural laws as regards its fixity characteristics.) But if this is correct, then the truth of the backtracking conditional appears to be in *conflict* with the truth of the can-claim.

In previous work, I have argued that, although there is clearly a difference between the power to initiate a backwards-flowing causal chain (issuing in a different past) and the power so to act that the past would have been different from what it actually was (counterfactual power over the past), it is not at all clear that this difference *makes* a relevant difference (as regards fixity). Surely, anyone who believes that the past is fixed in the sense that one cannot initiate a backwards-flowing causal chain issuing in a different past will *also* contend that one cannot at some time perform an action which is such that, were he to perform it, the past would have been different from what it actually was. The point is that it is a pervasive feature of our

<sup>16</sup> When Freddoso claims that Molina's theory of middle knowledge would provide a model for a certain sort of compatibilism, I do not take it that he is contending that it is *necessary* for a defence of the relevant sort of compatibilism—and I do not find the necessity claim plausible in any case.

common-sense way of framing issues about agency that the past is fixed and out of our control; and if this intuitive idea of the fixity of the past applies to initiating backward-flowing causal chains, it would seem to apply equally to counterfactual power over the past (in which it is necessary, in order to perform some act, that the past have been different from what it actually was).<sup>17</sup>

I frankly do not see how Freddoso's Molinism provides the resources to reply to this incompatibilistic worry. As I mentioned above, there are two distinct elements of Freddoso's Molinism—the theory of middle knowledge and the denial of (A). It will be helpful here to evaluate the two components separately with an eye to figuring out whether we can identify a strategy of response to the incompatibilist (on behalf of Freddoso's Molinist). I shall begin with the theory of middle knowledge, and I note here that the argument with respect to middle knowledge will proceed in two steps; in this section of the paper I undertake the first step, and in the following section I take the second step.

Freddoso claims that it is 'significant' that Molinism provides an intuitively accessible model showing how certain crucial claims can be true. Given the textual passage cited above, I am not absolutely sure whether Freddoso has in mind the two claims I have isolated above—the can-claim and the backtracker. I believe however that these are the two claims to which Freddoso is referring. In any case, these are indeed the crucial claims logically speaking, from the perspective of evaluating Molinism as a response to the incompatibilist's argument.

I suppose that in some sense Freddoso's contention is correct, since Molinism—in particular, the theory of middle knowledge—provides a picture or story in which the two claims could be true, *if the sceptical worry can be answered*. But the theory of middle knowledge in itself provides no answer to the sceptic; that is, it does not even seek to explain how the can-claim is compatible with the backtracker. Rather, it takes the compatibility of these claims for granted. It is thus at best *ancillary* to an answer to the incompatibilist, and it piggybacks on such an answer. Thus, the theory of middle knowledge is not *in itself* an answer to the basic thrust of the incompatibilist's argument.

To explain. On the theory of middle knowledge, God has prevolitional knowledge of a large set of conditionals specifying how individuals would freely behave in various circumstances: 'If in circumstance *C*1, agent *A* would freely do *X*' 'If in circumstance *C*2, agent *A* would freely do *Y*', and so forth. These conditionals are supposed to be simply 'given' in the sense that they are true prior to any decree by God as to which possible world

<sup>17</sup> For this point, see: Fischer 1994: 78–83.

will be actualized. But note that it is an assumption shared by Molina and Freddoso that acting freely implies freedom to do otherwise. So, on the theory of middle knowledge, conditional truths of the form, 'If agent A were in circumstance C1, he would be free to do other than he actually does (X), or 'If agent A were in circumstance C2, he would be free to do other than what he actually does (Y)' are simply assumed to be knowable by God prior to the relevant times (the times of the actions). Thus, it at least appears that the theory of middle knowledge simply presupposes that God's foreknowledge is compatible with human freedom to do otherwise! (I say a bit more to explain why exactly the theory of middle knowledge presupposes compatibilism in the following section; that is, I explain more explicitly why commitment to the relevant *conditionals* does indeed presuppose compatibilism.)

The theory of middle knowledge does not answer the incompatibilist's sceptical argument from the fixity of the past. The theory of middle knowledge does not even attempt to explain how the pertinent can-claims can be consistent with their paired backtracking conditionals. In assuming that God can know the conditionals in question, the theory of middle knowledge appears to be taking for granted the very question at issue in the debate between the compatibilist and the incompatibilist: it appears to be assuming that human agents can so act that the past would have been different from what it actually was.

I said above that, at best, the theory of middle knowledge is ancillary to (and piggybacks on) a genuine answer to the incompatibilist's challenge. The point is this. Given such an answer, the theory of middle knowledge provides a nice model for divine providence. My claim in this section has not been that the theory of middle knowledge is somehow incoherent or entirely useless; rather, I have contended that it doesn't help at all with the specific problem of reconciling God's foreknowledge with human freedom. However, given such a reconciliation, the theory of middle knowledge might be invoked to explain God's providence. Indeed, arguably it provides an attractive account of *how* God can know about future contingent truths without assuming causal determinism or a quasi-perceptual model (according to which God can have direct apprehension of future contingent events). But, of course, this presupposes that the basic thrust of the incompatibilist's argument can be rebutted.

The last caveat is important, and it is ignored at one's peril. When it is said that Molinism (the theory of middle knowledge) provides an account of 'how God can know future contingents', it might be thought that Molinism answers the 'how' question by providing some sort of answer to the incompatibilist. Indeed, in his otherwise superb recent book, *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will*, Robert Kane presents Molinism

(and, in particular, the theory of middle knowledge) as a response to the incompatibilist:

The third solution to the foreknowledge problem originated with another later medieval thinker, the Spanish Jesuit philosopher and theologian Luis de Molina ... Like Ockham, Molina rejected the timeless solution to the foreknowledge problem of Boethius and Aquinas. But Molina sought a better answer than Ockham was able to give about *how* God can foreknow future free actions. To explain this, Molina introduced the notion of divine 'middle knowledge'.<sup>18</sup>

But, as we have seen, Molinism (the theory of middle knowledge) does not in itself provide any sort of explanation of how God's foreknowledge is compatible with human free actions—it does not address the incompatibilist's worry. Thus, contrary to Kane's presentation, Molinism does not stand on a par with the views of Boethius, Aquinas, and Ockham, which are indeed attempts to answer the incompatibilist's worries. At best, the theory of middle knowledge explains how God knows about future contingents, given that he can know about them at all (something it does not seek to address).

Kane emphasizes (as others have) that Molina sought an answer to the question of *how* God can foreknow future free actions. One might distinguish, very roughly, two interpretations of the 'how-question'. On the first, one is asking for a 'nuts-and-bolts' account of how God can know about the future; on the second, one is asking for a philosophical explanation of how God can know about future free actions, where this involves an answer to the incompatibilist's challenge. In focusing on the contention that Molina provides an answer to the question of 'how God can know about future free actions', one can conflate the two versions of the question. But it is evident that a nuts-and-bolts answer does not in itself provide a philosophical explanation, which is really what is needed, if Molinism is indeed to be considered on a par with the views of Boethius, Aquinas, and Ockham.

Perhaps I could say a bit more to bring out the distinction I have in mind between a 'nuts-and-bolts' answer and a 'philosophical explanation'. By a 'philosophical explanation' I mean an answer to the question that takes the incompatibilist's challenge seriously; it thus seeks to address a certain kind of sceptical worry. Consider the fact that one could have a perfectly good mechanical description of some physical process. As long as we bracket sceptical hypotheses, scientific testing and confirmation works pretty well, and we may have an adequate 'nuts-and-bolts' explanation of the process. But we should not confuse such confirmation with confirmation

<sup>18</sup> Kane 2005: 157.

that radical scepticism is false; we should not confuse such an explanation with a genuine philosophical explanation that takes the sceptical hypotheses seriously.

In general, it is important to distinguish knowledge that there exist ‘how-to manuals’ about a subject matter, and knowledge of the details of a particular how-to manual. By a ‘philosophical explanation’ I mean knowledge of the existence of how-to manuals about a given subject matter, and some general understanding of how such manuals can exist, despite challenges to their existence. By a ‘nuts-and-bolts’ answer to the ‘how’ question I mean knowledge of the specifics in a particular how-to manual. Clearly, having one of these sorts of knowledge does not entail having the other.

Consider the question of how time-travel is possible. A philosophical explanation would consist of knowledge that how-to manuals on time travel exist, despite the sceptical worries about the coherence of time-travel. A nuts-and-bolts answer to the question would say how to go about traveling in time—first one builds a timemachine, and so forth. Clearly, if time travel is indeed possible, one could have the latter sort of knowledge without the former: one can read the how-to manual without knowing the answers to the sceptical worries about time-travel.<sup>19</sup>

### II.1b. A refined argument with respect to middle knowledge

In the previous section I contended that on Molina’s theory of middle knowledge, God is said to know in advance a large set of conditionals of the form, ‘If in circumstance *C*1, agent *A* would freely do *X*’, ‘If in circumstance *C*2, agent *A* would freely do *Y*’, and so forth. Given Molina’s assumption about the relationship between acting freely and freedom to do otherwise, I noted that truths of the form, ‘In circumstance *C*1, agent *A* would be free to do other than he actually does (*X*)’, ‘In circumstance *C*2 agent *A* is free to do other than what he actually does (*Y*)’, and so forth are simply assumed to be knowable by God prior to the relevant times (the times of the actions). I claimed that this seems to show that the Molinist is here simply assuming or presupposing what is under dispute—that God’s foreknowledge is compatible with human freedom in the sense that requires freedom to do otherwise.

But the Molinist might reply as follows.<sup>20</sup> The template of Molinist views sketched above does *not* posit that God knows some simple, unconditional

<sup>19</sup> Here I am thankful for comments by Neal A. Tognazzini.

<sup>20</sup> I am indebted to Eleonore Stump for pointing out the need to address this Molinist point.

claim of the form, 'Agent *A* does *X* freely' or 'Agent *A* is free to do other than he actually does'. Rather, on this constellation of Molinist views, God is only said to know (prevolitionally) *conditionals*, such as, 'If in circumstance *C*1, agent *A* would freely do *X*,' and 'If in circumstance *C*1, agent *A* would be free to do other than he actually does (*X*)'. But certainly God can know these conditionals without knowing the unconditional truths posited in the consequents. (That is, prior to God's willing to create a particular set of antecedent circumstances, He can know the conditionals in question without knowing the unconditional truths posited in the consequents.) His merely knowing the *conditionals* does not straightforwardly involve presupposing that God can know in advance that human agents can be free to do otherwise; it is an important feature of Molina's theory of middle knowledge that it thus avoids begging the question against the incompatibilist.

I grant that this is a legitimate move on the part of the Molinist, and I grant that the argument presented in the previous section does not—apart from further considerations—decisively show the Molinist theory of middle knowledge to presuppose compatibilism; the considerations presented above are the first step in a two-step argument. The second step contends that there is no relevant difference (as regards the dialectical issues) between positing God's knowledge of the conditionals and God's knowledge of the unconditional truths specified by their consequents.

To elaborate. It should be absolutely obvious and uncontentious that in the dialectical context (in which the incompatibilist's argument is under consideration), it would be question-begging (or at least not dialectically helpful at all) simply to bring forward (without explanation) the claim that God does know in advance truths of the form, 'At some future time agent *A* will be free to do other than he actually does (*X*)'. This simply posits, without explanation, that in the actual world God knows in advance that some human agent will in fact be free to do otherwise. My contention is that it would be *similarly* question-begging (or at least not dialectically helpful at all) simply to bring forward (without explanation) the claim that God can know in advance truths of the form, 'If agent *A* were in (possible) circumstance *C*1, *A* would be free to do other than he actually does (*X*)'.

Note that God is assumed by the Molinist to know (via His natural knowledge) that (say) *C*1 is possible. So God knows that there is a possible world in which *C*1 obtains. Since (according to the Molinist) He also knows (via His middle knowledge) the conditional, 'If agent *A* were in (possible) circumstance *C*1, *A* would be free to do other than he actually does (*X*)', it follows that God knows that there is a possible world in which *A* is free to do other than he actually does. (Obviously, God's knowledge is closed under known implication.) Molinism here simply *posits* that it is possible that

God knows in advance that a human agent is free to do otherwise. But the incompatibilist's argument putatively establishes that God's foreknowledge is *incompatible* with human freedom to do otherwise—and thus that it is *impossible*—there is *no* possible world—in which God knows in advance that some human agent is free to do otherwise. And it would clearly be dialectically unfair and unproductive, within the context of a fair-minded evaluation of the incompatibilist's argument, simply to *presuppose without explanation or justification* that in some possible world (perhaps not the actual world) God does indeed know in advance that human agents are free to do otherwise.

Put slightly differently, my argument here is that if it is problematic for the Molinist simply to posit (without explanation or argument) that God *does* in fact know in advance that a human agent is free to do otherwise, it would be similarly problematic for the Molinist simply to posit (without explanation or argument) that God *can* know in advance that a human agent is free to do otherwise. If it is problematic simply to assert that the actual world contains both God and human freedom to do otherwise, it would be similarly problematic simply to assert that there exists some possible world (perhaps different from the actual world) that contains both God and human freedom to do otherwise. Within the relevant dialectical context, the latter claim is no more helpful than the former.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> There is perhaps an unclarity in the notion of God's 'knowing in advance'. It might be useful to distinguish the following two claims: 1. In some possible world, God knows in advance that some human agent is free to do otherwise; 2. God knows in advance that, in some possible world, some human agent is free to do otherwise. My critique in the text appears to presuppose that the Molinist is committed to (1). But if the Molinist is only committed to (2), it is not clear that Molinism is open to the critique. (1) seems to assume that there is a single 'absolute' temporal framework into which both God and the various possible worlds fit; this temporal sequence exists prior to God's willing to actualize any particular world. A commitment to (2), on the other hand, seems to deny that there is such a temporal framework; on this view, it is as though God's decreeing that a particular world be actual brings into being the temporal framework—a framework that did not exist antecedently. Further, on this view there are presumably different temporal sequences associated with each possible world. On this picture, God atemporally decrees that a particular possible world come into being, along with its associated spatio-temporal framework.

I am not confident that the Molinist will wish to adopt (2) and the suggested metaphysical picture; here I simply wish to note that it may be open to a Molinist to pursue this approach. (I am indebted to Neal Tognazzini for helping me to see that the Molinist may have this option.) But I also wish to note that it is not clear that adopting (2) solves the problem, since it would seem to me that worries similar to the ones developed in my critique will arise at the point at which God wills to actualize a particular possible world, even on (2). At that point, on the Molinist assumptions, God must be assumed to have prior knowledge of human freedom to do otherwise—but this knowledge comes 'for free', as it were—the compatibility claim is simply presupposed, and no answer is given to the sceptic.

Of course, one cannot simply point out that the conclusion of the incompatibilist's argument entails something that does not fit with something invoked by a compatibilist and expect that the compatibilist will be silenced! And, in general, it is a somewhat delicate project to say what constitutes 'begging the question'.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps it is wiser and more careful to point out here that the basic ingredients that go into the incompatibilist's argument—including some crystallization of the intuitive idea of the fixity of the past—appear to entail a *general* incompatibility result, not a world-indexed result. Further, these ingredients should commend themselves to fair and reasonable people not antecedently committed to a position in the debate between the incompatibilist and compatibilist—they are not *only* attractive to an antecedent incompatibilist.

The Molinist reply points to the subtlety of his position. I believe however that this subtlety has perhaps blinded some of its proponents to its deeper dialectical difficulties. If it is problematic simply to presuppose that God actually foreknows that humans are free to do otherwise, it is similarly problematic to presuppose that it is possible that God foreknows that humans are free to do otherwise. If the Molinist strategy based on the theory of middle knowledge is not *straightforwardly* unproductive and question-begging here, it is nevertheless unproductive and question-begging.

I wish to end this part of the paper by being as explicit as I can be about the dialectical situation here, keeping in mind a broader perspective on the debates about God's foreknowledge and human freedom. Some have begun their analysis of the relationship between these two phenomena by noting that mere human foreknowledge does not in itself rule out human freedom to do otherwise. After all, the order of explanation when knowledge is under discussion goes from fact to mind, rather than the other way around; so it is natural to suppose that mere human foreknowledge does not threaten human freedom to do otherwise. It is then tempting to conclude that the situation is similar with respect to God's foreknowledge.

But the situation is manifestly *not* similar—or at least not indisputably similar! This is because doing otherwise in the context of God's foreknowledge (as opposed to the context of mere human foreknowledge) would arguably require so acting that some temporally genuine or non-relational feature of the past would not have been a feature of the past, whereas doing

<sup>22</sup> As far as I can tell, my point is not simply about the dialectical impropriety of this sort of presupposition in the context of a conversation or discussion with someone who holds the other viewpoint. Additionally, I do not see that the Molinist has sought to offer any *reason* to accept the presupposition—a reason that could be evaluated by someone trying to figure out whether the sceptical worries are decisive, quite apart from any discussion or conversation with anyone else.

otherwise in the context of human foreknowledge would not.<sup>23</sup> So it does not *follow* from some uncontroversial facts about knowledge (and foreknowledge) that God's foreknowledge is compatible with human freedom; and the incompatibilist is perfectly within his rights to point to the apparent asymmetry between human foreknowledge and God's foreknowledge.

Now a standard move here is to accept the distinction between temporally relational and non-relational features of the past (hard and soft features) but to take the Ockhamist position that God's prior beliefs are entirely relational or soft features of the past. On this view, the symmetry between human foreknowledge and God's foreknowledge is reinstated. Of course, Ockhamism is an important and distinctive view about the relationship between God's foreknowledge and human freedom, and I have discussed it at some length elsewhere.<sup>24</sup> A Molinist may well embrace Ockhamism at this point in the dialectic. But then it is crucial to see that *all* of the work of reconciling God's foreknowledge and human freedom is being done by Ockhamism, and *none* is being done by Molinism! Here Molinism would not be offering anything substantive and distinctive in the reconciliation project. Now this is not to say that Molinism is identical to Ockhamism in all respects.<sup>25</sup> Nor is it to say that Molinism does not offer distinctive and important contributions to our understanding of God's providential powers. But it *is* to say that (on this picture, according to which the Molinist adopts the Ockhamist move discussed above) Molinism does not offer a distinctive answer to the incompatibilist. And this is all that I've been arguing all along.

## II.2. The denial of (A)

Most philosophers associate the theory of middle knowledge with 'Molinism'. But above I pointed out that there are two apparently separate components of Freddoso's Molinism—the denial of (A) and the theory of middle knowledge. Recall:

(A) *p* is accidentally necessary at *t* if and only if (i) *p* is metaphysically contingent and (ii) *p* is true at *t* and at every moment after *t* in every possible world that shares the same history with our world at *t*.

If one denies (A), one is willing to say that not all features of the past are fixed and out of our control in the present. As I noted above, the

<sup>23</sup> For more careful development and discussion of this point (and related points), see: Fischer (ed.) 1989; and Fischer 1992.

<sup>24</sup> For a systematic presentation of my critique of Ockhamism, see Fischer 1994: 111–30.

<sup>25</sup> For example, I do not think that Ockhamism is committed to the framework of Molinism in which there are true 'counterfactuals of freedom'.

Ockhamist also seems to deny that all features of the past are now fixed. But the Ockhamist denies only the fixity of temporally relational or ‘soft’ features of the past. Insofar as Molinism is supposed to be distinct here, the Molinist is taken to claim that even some temporally non-relational or ‘hard’ features of the past are such that we can now so act that they would not have been features of the past.

Of course, a compatibilist about causal determinism and human freedom to do otherwise may accept (and typically does accept) that humans can sometimes so act that hard facts about the past would not have been facts. I have dubbed such a compatibilist, a ‘Multiple-pasts Compatibilist’.<sup>26</sup> What makes the Molinist denial of (A) distinct from the general doctrine of Multiple-pasts Compatibilism is that the Molinist holds that *all* causally relevant features of the past—all features of the causal history leading to the present moment—must be held fixed; according to the Molinist denial of (A), this leaves it open that non-causally relevant features of the past—features of the past that are not along the causal path to the present—need not be held fixed. So the Molinist in question here holds a restricted fixity of the past principle. He contends (as against the Ockhamist) that not all temporally nonrelational facts need to be held fixed; and he contends (as against the Multiple-pasts Compatibilist) that all features of the causal history leading to the present must be held fixed.<sup>27</sup>

Despite Freddoso’s linkage of them, the relationship between the two components of Molinism—the denial of (A) and the theory of middle knowledge—is not immediately obvious. They appear to be separate ideas. For reasons adduced in the previous sections, it should be evident that

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, ‘Introduction’ in Fischer (ed.) 1986: esp. pp. 32–40; and Fischer 1994: 78–82.

<sup>27</sup> Freddoso puts the restricted version of (A) as follows: ‘(A\*)  $p$  is accidentally necessary at  $t$  if and only if (i)  $p$  is metaphysically contingent and (ii)  $p$  is true at  $t$  and (iii) for any possible world  $w$  such that  $w$  shares the same causal history with our world at  $t$ , no agent has the power at or after  $t$  in  $w$  to contribute causally to  $p$ ’s not being true’ (Freddoso 1988: 59). Here Freddoso appears to elide the distinction between causation and causal determinism; for simplicity’s sake, I shall follow Freddoso in employing ‘causal history’ to refer to causal determination.

In the text I am assuming that the Molinist believes that causal determinism is incompatible with freedom in the relevant sense (requiring genuine access to alternative possibilities). Thus, I take it that the Molinist must hold that all causally relevant facts about the past are to be held fixed. If a theorist does not agree that all such facts are to be held fixed, then it is not at all evident how he could defend incompatibilism about causal determinism and freedom. (Of course, one could detach other features of Molinism from the view that causal determinism rules out freedom; this would be a worthwhile doctrine to explore, but it would not be ‘Molinism’.)

the *mere* acceptance of the theory of middle knowledge does *not* in itself provide any justification for the denial of (A).<sup>28</sup>

Freddoso's point is that a Molinist *must* deny (A); but presumably the philosophically more interesting (and important) question is whether a denial of (A) *plausible*. As just noted, one cannot invoke the theory of middle knowledge to seek to justify a denial of (A). Let us consider (again) what Freddoso says in defence of the denial of (A):

God's foreknowledge is not a cause of Peter's sinning. To the contrary, it is evident that Peter's sinful act satisfies the necessary condition for indeterministic freedom ... There is, after all, no reason to think that God's foreknowledge makes the sin occur by a necessity of nature or that it is in any way a contemporaneous cause of the sin.

But I do not find it at all plausible that (A) is false; and I certainly do not find it plausible that it is false in the way required by the Molinist. I happily grant what Freddoso says here—that God's foreknowledge does not cause Peter's sinning. Indeed, I can grant that nothing causally determines it (and hence that nothing causally determines it in a problematic way). But this concession does nothing to vitiate the force of the commonsense point that the past is fixed. If the past is really fixed because it is 'over-and-done-with', then *all* of the past, insofar as it is over-and-done-with, is now fixed. If one feels the force of the idea that the past is fixed insofar as it is past, then it seems highly dubious to distinguish causally relevant from causally irrelevant features of the past (in regard to their fixity). It may well be that the fact that John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963 is causally irrelevant to my current state and behavior; but if the past is fixed because it is over-and-done-with, then surely the fact that John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963 is now fixed, quite apart from its causal relevance to me now. I cannot now perform any action which is such that were I to perform it, John F. Kennedy would not have been assassinated in 1963. So, whereas the denial of (A) would indeed allow the Molinist to respond to the incompatibilist, it is highly implausible, and such a denial certainly does not follow from the considerations invoked by Freddoso.

<sup>28</sup> Perhaps the link between the acceptance of the theory of middle knowledge and the rejection of (A) can be made more perspicuous as follows. The Molinist accepts the theory of middle knowledge together with the doctrine that God is necessarily foreknowing. Thus, the Molinist is committed to the existence of worlds where creatures act freely and God foreknows as much. But worlds where creatures act freely (taking freedom, as does the Molinist, as freedom to do otherwise) and God foreknows it are worlds in which (A) is false. And if (A) is false in some worlds, then presumably it is false in all. (I am indebted to Tom Crisp for this point.)

To help to see the extreme implausibility of the Molinist stance here, consider the position of the Multiple-pasts Compatibilist. This sort of compatibilist (like the Molinist) is willing to say that even hard features of the past are not fixed—that agents can sometimes so act that temporally nonrelational features of the past would not have been features of the past. Such a compatibilist typically holds that one is free to do otherwise in a causally deterministic world, unless certain ‘special’ circumstances obtain. (‘Mere’ causal determination is not deemed to be a special circumstance.) Thus, this sort of compatibilist holds that the only relevance of the past is to create certain circumstances in the present (relative to the behavior under consideration). On this view, the past must cast a certain sort of *shadow* on the present, in order for it to constrain one. Keith Lehrer calls this the *Shadow Principle*.<sup>29</sup>

Freddoso’s defence of the denial of (A) fits with the *Shadow Principle*. But it is striking that the Molinist is clearly *not* a multiple-pasts compatibilist; the Molinist insists that causal determinism is incompatible with human freedom. An incompatibilist about causal determinism and human freedom (in the sense that requires freedom to do otherwise) *rejects* the *Shadow Principle* and holds that constraints on an individual’s power can arise from the *relationship* between the present and past *in itself*, rather than requiring a present shadow of indisputably freedom-undermining factors cast by the past. Thus, the incompatibilist accepts something like the *Dog’s Tail Principle*: the past is viewed as like a dog’s tail, which follows the [intact] dog wherever it goes.<sup>30</sup> A version of the *Dog’s Tail Principle* is articulated rather elegantly by Carl Ginet as follows:

If I have it open to me now to make the world contain a certain event after now, then I have it open to me now to make the world contain everything that has happened before now plus that event after now. We might call this the principle that *freedom is freedom to add to the given past ...*<sup>31</sup>

An incompatibilist about causal determinism and freedom to do otherwise would typically accept that our freedom is the freedom to add to the given past; after all, the past is over-and-done-with and out of our control. And the Molinist is an incompatibilist about causal determinism and freedom to do otherwise. But Freddoso points out that the Molinist must deny (A)—he must deny the unrestricted fixity of the past (the *Dog’s Tail Principle*). Rather, the Molinist embraces the view that only a proper subset of features of the past—the causally relevant features—are now fixed.

<sup>29</sup> Keith Lehrer, ‘Self-Profile’, in Bogdan, ed. 1981: 31; for a discussion, see Fischer 1994: 196–7.

<sup>30</sup> Fischer 1994: 197.

<sup>31</sup> Ginet 1990: 102–3.

Whereas the Molinist's position here is logically coherent, it seems to me to be highly unstable and intuitively dubious. If one rejects multiple-pasts compatibilism because the past is over-and-done-with, how could one say that only some—not all—past facts are fixed? After all, *all* past facts (temporally non-relational or hard facts) are now over-and-done with.<sup>32</sup> The Molinist's rejection of the compatibility of causal determinism and human freedom to do otherwise requires a principle that does not sit well with a rejection of (A); Molinism thus appears to be unstable.

It just seems highly plausible to me that our freedom is indeed the freedom to add to the given past. Of course, a compatibilist about causal determinism and human freedom to do otherwise may well deny this, contending that the *only* relevance of the past is that it leads to certain circumstances contemporaneous to the behavior under evaluation (the *Shadow Principle*). In my view, this sort of view is not particularly plausible; but it is not straightforwardly problematic or unstable. What issues in the distinctive instability of Molinism is its claim that 'causally relevant' features of the past are fixed simply because they are past (and not in virtue of casting a shadow of the relevant sort on the present), whereas causally irrelevant features of the past need not be fixed. If causally relevant facts about the past are fixed *qua* past, then so should be causally irrelevant past facts. If causally relevant facts about the past are fixed but not simply *qua* past, then what exactly is it in virtue of which they are fixed? Note that the Molinist, insofar as he is an incompatibilist about causal determinism and human freedom, *cannot* say that it is in virtue of those facts *casting a shadow* on the present—a shadow of indisputably freedom-undermining contemporaneous factors. For the *Shadow Principle* leads to compatibilism about causal determinism and freedom to do otherwise.<sup>33</sup>

In summary, Freddoso identifies two elements of Molina's views on the basis of which a Molinist may allegedly respond to the challenge posed by the incompatibilist about God's foreknowledge and human freedom (in a sense that requires freedom to do otherwise.): the theory of middle

<sup>32</sup> Thus, insofar as what is driving one is intuitions about what is 'over-and-done-with', one should say that freedom requires different possible action with the same past—not different possible action with the same causally relevant past.

<sup>33</sup> Another way of putting the point is as follows. The Molinist, being an incompatibilist about causal determinism and human freedom to do otherwise, presumably must accept the so-called 'Consequence Argument' for incompatibilism: (Van Inwagen 1983). But if the Molinist denies (A), he cannot also accept the Consequence Argument, which employs a fixity-of-the-past principle such as (A). I suppose a Molinist could conceivably reject the Consequence Argument but accept some *other* argument for incompatibilism about causal determinism and freedom to do otherwise, but I do not see how this sort of position could be developed plausibly. For a helpful exploration of the apparent instability of Molnism here, see: Perszyk 2003.

knowledge and the denial of (A). I have argued that the theory of middle knowledge is no response at all; rather, it presupposes some antecedent and independent response to the incompatibilist. This is of course not to say that the theory of middle knowledge is not theologically interesting or important; it does provide a model for God's providence, *given an antecedent solution to the problem of the relationship between God's foreknowledge and human freedom*. I have simply sought to show that the importance of the theory of middle knowledge is here, rather than in providing a response to the incompatibilist (and thus a solution to the problem of reconciling God's omniscience with human freedom). Further, I have contended that, although a denial of (A) of the sort envisaged by the Molinist would provide an answer to the incompatibilist, it is unstable and highly implausible. If our freedom is the freedom to add to the given past, it seems very odd to suppose that we can subtract off some of the past, leaving the dog with only part of its tail.

Neither of the elements identified by Freddoso as part of Molinism is particularly promising then. Note that my critique has completely bypassed the huge literature on whether the conditionals posited by the theory of middle knowledge can be true.<sup>34</sup> This literature raises fascinating and complex issues. In my view, however, the problems I have pointed to are independent of these issues and raise at least as fundamental worries for Molinism, if not even more basic problems.

### II.3. Molinism: the best game in town?

In his important and influential book on Molinism, Thomas P. Flint argues that Molinism is 'by far the best game in town' for a Christian.<sup>35</sup> More specifically, Flint argues that the 'twin bases of Molinism'—a libertarian view of human freedom and a 'traditional' view of providence—constitute the doctrine of 'libertarian traditionalism', and he says, 'Absent insurmountable problems which its acceptance might engender, libertarian traditionalism seems, if not the only, then at least by far the best game in town.'<sup>36</sup>

It is perhaps not surprising that I do not find that Molinism is the only or best game in town for a Christian or for anyone. And it will not at all be surprising that I *certainly* do not believe that it is 'by far' the best game in town. Flint is quite explicit that he does not think he can provide a knockdown argument for libertarian traditionalism. In contrast, he lays out three considerations that he feels should result in the conclusion that this doctrine is 'by far the best game in town,' even if it is indeed possible for a

<sup>34</sup> For just a sample, see: Adams 1977; and Flint 1998.

<sup>35</sup> Flint 1998.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 34.

reasonable person to reject it. I shall not address the first two considerations in detail here, although I certainly have attempted to do so elsewhere.<sup>37</sup> Here I shall simply summarize some of the worries I have about Flint's first two arguments, and I shall develop a critique of his third. Finally, I shall add a worry that I believe weighs heavily against libertarian traditionalism in overall assessment of the doctrine.

In presenting what he takes to be one of the two bases of Molinism—libertarian freedom—Flint lays out three propositions:

- (1) Some human actions are free.
- (2) All human actions are ultimately causally determined by events not under the causal control of their agents.
- (3) It is not possible that a free human action be ultimately causally determined by events not under the causal control of its agent.<sup>38</sup>

Clearly, these three propositions, each of which has some initial plausibility, are inconsistent. Although Flint emphasizes that he does not seek to present a decisive argument, he does find libertarianism alluring, and he rejects (2), which he attributes to the compatibilist. He offers three arguments for the rejection of compatibilism and the acceptance of libertarianism, the first two of which are purportedly available even to secular philosophers.

Flint's first argument is basically the so-called 'Consequence Argument', to use Peter van Inwagen's term.<sup>39</sup> This argument is structurally parallel to the argument of the incompatibilist about God's foreknowledge and human freedom; of course, it employs not only the Fixity of the Past but also the Fixity of the Natural Laws. Flint's point here is that propositions (1) and (2) entail that some free human actions are causally determined (by events not under the control of the agents), and that the Consequence Argument shows (even if not decisively) that this cannot be so.

Leave aside for now whether the Consequence Argument, in any of its myriad forms, is sound; I am inclined to think it is, but we do not need to take a stand on this issue here. Rather, I would simply point out that

- (1) Some human actions are free

is ambiguous. On one reading, (1) says that some human actions are free in the sense that the agent is free to do otherwise; on this reading, I am inclined to agree with Flint that (1) and (2) are inconsistent with the very impressive Consequence Argument. But on another reading, (1) says that some human actions are free in the sense that the agents act freely (and are morally responsible for what they do). Although, of course, this view is

<sup>37</sup> See, for example: Fischer 1994; Fischer and Mark Ravizza 1998; Fischer 2006.

<sup>38</sup> Flint 1998: 22, 23.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26–8; Van Inwagen 1983; and Ginet 1990.

contentious, I would argue that agents can act freely even in the absence of the freedom to do otherwise.<sup>40</sup> I am not alone in holding this view, and it (arguably) allows for a certain very attractive kind of compatibilism: a compatibilism about causal determinism and acting freely. What is striking is that Flint does not even consider such a view. He essentially assumes that free action requires freedom to do otherwise.<sup>41</sup>

Flint's second argument is basically the Direct Argument for the Incompatibility of Causal Determinism and Moral Responsibility.<sup>42</sup> This argument is parallel to the Consequence Argument, although here the relevant modality is moral responsibility, rather than power or freedom. The argument employs a crucial *Transfer of Nonresponsibility Principle*:

(TNR) If no one is morally responsible for  $p$ , and no one is morally responsible for the truth that  $p$  leads to  $q$ , then no one is morally responsible for  $q$ .<sup>43</sup>

Very roughly, the Direct Argument has it that causal determinism entails that there is some (temporally non-relational) condition of the universe,  $C$  at some time prior to my birth, which, together with the laws of nature, entails that I behave as I do now. But I am not morally responsible for  $C$ , and I am not morally responsible for the fact that  $C$  together with the laws of nature entails that I behave as I do now. Given (TNR), it follows that I am not morally responsible for what I do now. Obviously, the argument generalizes.

But this is at best a highly contentious argument. I have argued that there are clear counterexamples to (TNR), and further that any attempt to modify (TNR) to yield a principle that will work successfully in the incompatibilist's argument is doomed to failure.<sup>44</sup> Further, David Widerker has argued that the Direct Argument depends crucially on the Consequence Argument, and thus offers no additional support for incompatibilism.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>40</sup> See: Frankfurt 1969; and Fischer 1994, 1998 [Fischer and Ravizza], and 2006.

<sup>41</sup> In fairness to Flint, he does offer an intriguing modification to the Principle of Alternative Possibilities (according to which moral responsibility requires the sort of freedom that involves access to alternative possibilities), which he suggests is immune to the sorts of objections one finds in the literature inspired by Frankfurt 1969 in Flint 1998: 165–6. And it is certainly unfair to require anyone to address this huge literature in a project such as that of Flint.

<sup>42</sup> Van Inwagen 1983. Flint attributes the view that many Christians would be attractive to such an argument to Alvin Plantinga (Plantinga 1984: 265–6).

<sup>43</sup> Fischer and Ravizza 1998: 151–69.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 1998; and Fischer, 'The Transfer of Non-Responsibility', in J. Campbell, M. O'Rourke, and D. Shier (eds) 2004; reprinted in Fischer 2006; 159–74.

<sup>45</sup> Widerker 2002. For further discussion, see John Martin Fischer, 'The Direct Argument: You Say Goodbye, I Say Hello', in Trakakis (ed.) forthcoming.

I cannot go into the details of the discussion here, but it should suffice simply to note that the Direct Argument is (at best) contested vigorously.

Flint's third argument is supposed to appeal to Christian philosophers.<sup>46</sup> Flint here points out that God is a *free* agent par-excellence. Specifically, God is a free creator of the universe, and yet there simply *are* no causes external to God which 'could, so to speak, set him in motion'.<sup>47</sup> Flint develops the argument as follows:

God is a free creator. Yet it seems that the typical compatibilist complaints against the libertarian notion of a free action are (from an orthodox Christian's perspective) not applicable to God's actions. But then, if God's actions can be rational and appropriate, actions for which he is properly seen as morally praiseworthy, even in the absence of any ultimate causes beyond his control, then there clearly can be no *conceptual* problem with the notion of free, rational, responsible, but undetermined actions. And if there is no such conceptual problem, then there seems to be no conceptual problem with viewing ourselves as agents with libertarian freedom as well.<sup>48</sup>

I am inclined to agree with what Flint says here. But what should also be obvious is that this argument does nothing to show that compatibilism per se or (2) is false; its target is merely a particular argument for (or perhaps version of) compatibilism or (2). That is, Flint's argument only cuts against a compatibilist who contends that causal determination is *necessary* for human freedom, and whereas some compatibilists certainly believe this, it is in no way an essential part of compatibilism. For example, my view is that human freedom (in the relevant sense) and moral responsibility are compatible with both causal determinism and indeterminism. And it is clear that Flint's argument is completely orthogonal to this sort of compatibilism; it offers no reason for a Christian (or anyone) to reject this sort of compatibilism.

To take stock. I find the three arguments sketched by Flint on behalf of the doctrine that encapsulates the 'twin bases of Molinism' unconvincing. In fairness to Flint, he does not present them as apodictic or as part of a thorough discussion of the relevant issues; and it must be conceded that many philosophers will find the considerations he adduces persuasive. But I should register my view that they fall considerably short of being compelling. And I wish to present a final consideration, which I believe should weigh heavily against libertarian traditionalism (and thus Molinism).

Note that Molinism requires causal indeterminism. But I believe that the doctrine of causal determinism is an empirical doctrine; if it is true,

<sup>46</sup> Flint attributes a similar line of reasoning to Alvin Plantinga in Flint 1998: 30; according to Flint, the Plantinga reasoning is in Plantinga 1984: 266–7.

<sup>47</sup> Flint 1998: 30.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* 30.

it is contingently true. Presumably, it is a scientific issue whether causal determinism or indeterminism obtains. What is disturbing about Molinism is that it commits anyone who believes in God (interpreted in the relevant way) to the falsity of causal determinism. Thus, it commits any religious person—anyone who believes in God and, in particular, any Christian—to the falsity of a scientific doctrine that presumably may or may not turn out to be true. It thus commits anyone who believes in God to the view that we can know from our armchairs, as it were, that an empirical scientific doctrine is false. If in the future scientists discover that causal determinism is true, a Molinist would be committed to denying the science—to denying it from his or her armchair! Or the Molinist who accepts the scientific discovery would have to give up his belief in God. This would seem to be a dialectically uncomfortable position—to say the least.

The Molinist is in this potentially torturous place in dialectical space precisely because of his commitment to libertarian traditionalism. It is implausible to posit that we can know the falsity of some interesting and live empirical hypothesis from one's armchair; and it is unattractive that one's belief in God should 'hang by a thread'—that it should depend on whether or not the scientists discover the truth of causal determinism.<sup>49</sup>

I wish simply to bring out this unattractive feature of Molinism; I do not suppose that it, or even it taken together with the other objections we have considered, is a decisive reason to reject Molinism. I would however submit that it should be given significant weight in an overall assessment of Molinism. Just as we do not want our moral responsibility to 'hang on a thread'—to be dependent on whether the laws of nature are universal or almost-universal generalizations—we do not want our belief in God to 'hang on a thread'.

It is sometimes thought that a religious person and, in particular, a Christian, must reject compatibilism. I agree that there are difficult issues here, especially as regards the Problem of Evil. But I wish here simply to show that there is another side to the story—that there are significant reasons for a religious philosopher (in the Judaeo-Christian tradition) to *want* there to be a plausible compatibilist account of freedom and moral responsibility. After all, it is an open scientific question whether causal determinism is true. If it does in fact turn out to be true, wouldn't a religious philosopher want to be able to maintain his beliefs in freedom, moral responsibility, and God? One way of putting it is that it would seem extremely attractive—indeed, important—for a (say) Christian to have a

<sup>49</sup> Similarly, I have argued that our view of ourselves as morally responsible agents should not 'hang by a thread': Fischer and Ravizza 1998: 253–4.

compatibilist view of freedom and responsibility in his breast pocket, as it were, in case it turns out that causal determinism is true. And, as I pointed out above, a compatibilist view of freedom and responsibility need not in any way *require* causal determinism; so it would be perfectly consistent with viewing God's creation of the world as a free act, and even ordinary human free acts as in fact not causally determined.

Return to the passage from Flint quoted above, 'Absent insurmountable problems which its acceptance might engender, libertarian traditionalism seems, if not the only, then at least by far the best game in town.' Taken literally, I suppose I do not disagree, but only in the sense that I am also prepared to say, 'Absent insurmountable problems which its acceptance might engender, I would put forward the claim that George W. Bush is an outstanding President of the United States'! One can perhaps interpret my arguments in this section as bringing out some arguably insurmountable problems for the acceptance of libertarian traditionalism.

### III. CONCLUSION

There is much of value in the voluminous literature on Molinism and related issues. For just one example, Molinism provides an elegant picture of how God could select a particular possible world to actualize, among the various possible worlds He could actualize. It thus provides an illuminating model of Divine Providence. But many philosophers—including, most recently, Robert Kane—have thought that Molinism provides an answer to the great traditional problem of reconciling God's foreknowledge with human freedom, an answer on a par with those of (say) of Aristotle, Boethius, Aquinas, and Ockham. I have shown why this view is mistaken; Molinism presupposes an answer to the incompatibilist's challenge, but it does not in itself provide an answer.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Robert Adams has pointed out to me (in personal correspondence) that perhaps the Molinist does have something to say in order to increase the plausibility of the compatibility of the can-claim and the backtracking counterfactual. That is if one were worried that the reason why the two are incompatible is that the only way the backtracker could be true is due to clearly implausible or freedom-undermining conditions (like backward causation or predetermination), then the Molinist picture can allow us to avoid such concerns.

But in my view the fundamental worry posed by the incompatibilist stems from the fixity of the past, *not* causation or causal determination. Thus I believe that the mere truth of the backtracker would call into question the truth of the can-claim. Additionally, even if we grant the Molinist's separation of issues of causation from the grounding of the backtracker, this would at best 'pave the way' for an argument that the can-claim and the backtracker would be compatible. But of course this is a far cry from actually *offering* such an argument.

Of course, there has been much discussion of the so-called ‘counterfactuals of freedom’, the subjunctive conditionals (whose consequents specify that agents act freely) posited by Middle Knowledge. As is well known, Robert Adams (and others) have challenged the idea that these sorts of conditionals can be true antecedently to God’s willing a world to be the actual world, and others (including Freddoso) have sought to reply to the challenges. Lots of ink has been spilled, and many trees felled. Perhaps it is now clear that, although a resolution of these issues is crucial in evaluating Molinism qua model of God’s providence, it is not relevant to providing an answer to the problem of reconciling God’s foreknowledge with human freedom. It is important to note that I am in no way suggesting that the debates about Middle Knowledge are not significant; I simply wish to identify their significance more precisely.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> I wish to emphasize that I am not suggesting that Molina himself or all of his expositors (and followers) have mistakenly supposed that his theory provides an answer to the incompatibilist. Thomas Flint, in his thoughtful book referred to above, is careful to frame Molinism as primarily an account of Divine Providence, rather than in itself an answer to the incompatibilist; I do not mean to suggest that Flint is guilty of this sort of mistake. (For relevant discussion, see Flint 1998: 229–50.) Perhaps the target of my critique are those who have *expropriated* Molina’s views for purposes for which they were not, strictly speaking, intended, and to which they are not (in my view) suited.

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