

An Existentialist Critique of Molinism

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I. Introduction: Molinism versus Existentialism

In analytic philosophy of religion today, it is well-known that the particular conception of free will offered by Luis de Molina and Francis Suárez has been revived and plays a controversial role in the analysis of several problems. Although its classical purpose was to provide a way to reconcile libertarian freedom with providence and divine omniscience, the Molinist idea that there are contingent 'counterfactuals of freedom'¹—*facts* about what free creatures would do in any completely specified circumstance they could be in—is also critical to Alvin Plantinga's free will defense against the logical problem of evil, as presented in his *God, Freedom, and Evil*², *The Nature of Necessity*³, and other articles. In responding to critics who argued that an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God is logically inconsistent with the existence of freely willed creaturely evil, Plantinga relies on the Molinist intuition that some logically possible worlds are not *feasible* or 'weakly actualizable'⁴ by God, because they include at least one choice by a free agent which *in fact* that agent would not make if she were in the circumstances specified by the world.

Plantinga's now-famous example is a certain Curley, who has been offered one bribe but

¹As Robert Adams has pointed out, the truths of "middle knowledge" in de Molina's sense are "subjunctive conditional propositions, many of which are strictly counterfactual conditionals." There are subjunctive truths of *middle* knowledge even for choice-circumstances which actually occur, so they are not all strictly speaking *counterfactual*. See Robert M. Adams, 'An Anti-Molinist Argument,' in *Philosophical Perspectives 5: Philosophy of Religion, 1991*, ed. James E. Tomberlin (Atascadero, California: Ridgeview Publishing Co., 1991), 343-353, p.344.

²Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974). All references are to the pagination of the 1977 paperback edition (reprinted 1987).

³Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford University Press, 1974). All references are to the 1992 paperback reprint.

⁴As Plantinga uses this phrase in *The Nature of Necessity*, ch. IX, p.173, it is in fact a synonym for "feasibility" in the Molinist sense.

would have accepted a lesser one.⁵ As Plantinga explains this case, there is a *maximal segment* of a logically possible world in which Curley is offered the lesser bribe: i.e. a segment complete in every respect possible without determining Curley's decision either to take or not take this bribe. This world-segment (*S*) exists, as Plantinga says, in two different worlds, *W* and *W'*, such that *W* = *S* + Curley's accepting the bribe, and *W'* = *S* + Curley's refusing the bribe.⁶ Now comes the Molinist part: Plantinga assumes that *there is a truth* about what Curley would have done in the counterfactual situation *S*, at least when it is sufficiently specified: i.e. 'a state of affairs that includes Curley's having been offered \$20,000, all relevant conditions—Curley's financial situation, his general acquisitive tendencies, his venality—being the same as in fact, in the actual world.'⁷ In defense of this claim, Plantinga makes a plea that it accords with some of the deepest modal intuitions involved in moral experience:

There is something Curley would have done, had that state of affairs [as just specified] obtained. But I do not know how to produce a conclusive argument for this supposition, in case you are inclined to dispute it. I do think it is the natural view, the one we take in reflecting on our own moral failures and triumphs...⁸

Existentialists (myself included), however, there can be no question of intuitive inclination to accept or doubt Plantinga's Molinist premise: rather, it is ruled out *in principle*. In fact, the significance of Existentialism as a conception of free will is clarified by the fact that the rejection of Molinist subjunctive conditionals of freedom is essential to Existentialism. This does not prevent

⁵Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, op. cit., pp. 173-174, pp. 180-181. See p. 181: "suppose it is true as a matter of fact that if God had actualized *T* [the initial segment leading up to the choice], Curley would have accepted the bribe: then God could not have actualized *W** [the world in which Curley rejects the bribe]" See also Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, op. cit., pp. 45-48.

⁶This is my interpretation of Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, o. cit., p. 46.

⁷Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, op. cit., p. 180.

⁸Ibid, p. 46. Compare *God, Freedom, and Evil*, op. cit., p. 41, where, after giving two alternative counterfactual conditionals similar to those in Curley's case, Plantinga says "It seems clear that at least one of these conditionals is true, but naturally they can't both be....either way, there are possible worlds God could not have actualized."

Existentialists from acknowledging that Plantinga's premise speaks to certain intuitions we have about human action: as William Hasker puts it in his own critique of Molinism, 'there are not lacking situations in everyday life in which it seems plausible that we are taking counterfactuals of freedom to be true.'⁹ But Existentialists must insist that Molinism is the wrong theoretical explanation for the intuitions it might seem to express.¹⁰

Thus, if Existentialism is to be possible, Molinism must be refuted. While many arguments against Molinism will therefore brighten the Existentialist's prospects, my goal in this paper is to show that Existentialism itself provides the insights needed for a definitive refutation of Molinism and points us towards a new interpretation of the Molinist thesis, which is necessary to overcome objections to previous analytic critiques of Molinism. This new interpretation will show that for Molinist to be coherent, its conception of 'feasibility' must be understood as a *synthetic modality* analogous to nomological modality. In fact, as I will argue, the status of Molinist counterfactuals of freedom, as it has become progressively clearer in recent literature, opens up a novel realist account of the ontology of synthetic modalities *in general*. This finding is intrinsically interesting, though it will also give the Existentialist a new way to show that Molinism is incompatible with moral responsibility.

The paper has eight sections, including the introduction. In the next section, I will explain

⁹William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 23.

¹⁰As I hope to show in a sequel to this article, Existentialism has within it the resources to develop an *alternative positive* theoretical explanation of the intuitions Plantinga and others wrongly regard as warranting Molinism. But in this paper, I restrict myself to developing the negative side of the Existentialist's argument, namely, that whatever theoretical conception of free will correctly explains these intuitions, it cannot be Molinism. Hasker is in sympathy with this much of the Existentialist's position, for he agrees with Robert Adams that (A) "in nearly all of the cases where we are disposed to accept such counterfactuals as true, the epistemic grounds for our acceptance would be found precisely in our knowledge of...psychological facts" about the agent, and (B) that for the Molinist, these sorts of facts cannot be the truth-makers for counterfactuals of freedom. See Hasker, *op. cit.*, p.24.

what I mean by 'Existentialism' and explain the reasons internal to it for opposing Plantinga's Molinist supposition. This analysis will reveal two underlying Existentialist theses that undermine Molinism. Of course, however, the critique of Molinism does not begin with Existentialist premises that would presuppose the falsity of Molinism: rather, in section three, the critique begins with a preliminary comparison of causal modality and Molinist feasibility. In the fourth section, I then look at two earlier analytic critiques of Molinism and why they fail to complete the refutation of Molinism. The fifth section argues for the new interpretation of Molinism in terms of synthetic modality, and the sixth uses this interpretation, in combination with several further arguments, to close the loophole left earlier for a 'soft fact' account of counterfactuals of freedom. In the seventh section, I argue that since they must be understood as 'hard facts,' Molinist counterfactuals of freedom have to be attributed to our agency if the preliminary objection developed in third section is to be avoided. But for reasons Existentialism brings out, they cannot be attributed to human agency. The final argument shows, contrary to claims by some Molinists, that if such counterfactuals are true and unattributable to the agent of whom they are true, then that agent cannot be morally responsible for his or her actions.

II. Existentialist Libertarianism and Heideggerian 'Existence'

Like other libertarian theories, Existentialism also holds that moral responsibility requires the freedom to bring about different logically possible alternatives of the will. But what distinguishes Existentialism from other forms of libertarianism is the extent to which it extends libertarianism *beyond* merely logical possibility.¹¹ Virtually all Existentialist authors¹² also hold that a person also

¹¹Some libertarians, such as Leibnizians, hold that alternative logical possibilities are sufficient even if actions are causally and divinely certain; others, such as Thomists, hold that alternative logical and *causal* possibilities are necessary for moral responsibility, even if every action has a sufficient reason in divine creativity; Molinists require

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cannot be morally responsible for actions that are necessitated in *any* relevant synthetic sense.

Limitations imposed by physical laws, physiology, and perhaps even innate predilections can be real but cannot be deterministic if I am morally responsible for my action: I must have at least some range of alternative *physical* possibilities, alternative *physiological* possibilities, etc., if the decision is a responsible one. Existentialist authors have thus followed Kant's Anselmian interpretation of the ought-implies-can principle: e.g. *because* I can be held morally responsible for my career choice, even though I have been socialized and nurtured to enter into one particular field, it follows that I am not only logically but also *psychologically* free to do otherwise—even if choosing a career other than the one my family expects may be very difficult for me. For similar reasons, an Existentialist must deny that there can be any determined *facts* about what a given individual would responsibly choose in a given situation, `prior' to that individual's being actualized and making the choice.

As we will see, much of the Existentialist's argument against Molinism will depend on the notion of `priority' at stake here. But initially, it is clear that an Existentialist could only accept that there are truths about counterfactual choices such as Curley's if these truths are themselves determined by the individual's other *actual* free choices in time. This is the rigorous meaning behind the enigmatic existentialist motto that a free being's *existence* precedes their *essence*. By `essence,' the Existentialist does not mean a person's logical essence (or haecceity) in Plantinga's *de re* sense, but rather a person's ultimate character over his or her complete life, which will include his or her

¹¹(...continued)

freedom from divine determination as well but implicitly allow, as we shall see, determination of actions by *another* form of synthetic modality. In the current paper I only consider how Existentialism can respond to Molinism, but in the sequel I hope to show how Existentialism can critique the other major positions as well.

¹²I include Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre, and Jaspers, although not Nietzsche, who is not an "existentialist" in any sense that makes him comparable to these other figures. Heidegger is an existentialist in my sense, even though he disputed Sartre's implications that freedom necessarily involves an absolute arbitrariness in the for-itself. A strong Augustinian element of negative liberty is still central to Dasein, even though Heidegger combines it in a complex way with a substantive, `historical' characterization of the self.

real propensities for action. The Molinist's idea of the total set of a person's true counterfactuals of freedom not only expresses a conception of the person's 'practical essence' or 'ultimate character' in this sense; in its most rigorous form (as we will see) Molinism also suggests that a person's ultimate character is metaphysically prior to their being actualized and living their life. 'Existence precedes essence' may therefore be regarded as the direct antithesis of Molinism, since it means that *existing* in a state of practical freedom and leading one's life is metaphysically prior to the determination of one's ultimate practical character. The Molinist and Existentialist are thus diametric opponents *within* the scope of metaphysical libertarianism.

On the Existentialist side, this analysis can be supported by considering Martin Heidegger's claim that 'Dasein's 'Essence' is grounded in its existence.'¹³ By *Dasein*, Heidegger means the kind of being constitutive of *personhood*, or the being of a *self*. He holds that what makes gives an entity the personal identity of a self is not any sort of soul-substance but rather a 'structure' that requires the entity to be in concurrent volitional relations to itself, to others, and to its 'world' of environments and artifacts: as he says of Dasein, 'These entities, in their Being, comport themselves towards their Being.'¹⁴ Such constitutive relations are the ground of possibility for Dasein's distinctive capacity for *ontological* awareness, its ability to inquire into the meaning of its own Being and Being in general. Only persons are constituted by the sort of ontological relations to themselves, to their world, and to others that give rise to modal intuitions which make *ontological* meanings accessible. Its constitutive existential relations open Dasein to ontological meaning this way because they are themselves modally unsaturated relations: their reality leaves the individual Dasein free for different alternative meanings of its own Being, the Being of others, and of its world. Therefore these

¹³Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York, N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1962); §25, H117, p.152. References to this text will be given by the section number, German edition page number, and English translation page number, respectively.

¹⁴Ibid, ¶9, H42, p. 67.

existential relations do not define an Aristotelian 'what-it-is' (or scholastic *essentia*) for Dasein:

..because we cannot define Dasein's essence by citing a "what" of the kind that pertains to a subject matter, and because its essence lies rather in the fact that in each case it has its Being to be, *and has it as its own*, we have chosen to designate this entity as 'Dasein.'

The term *Dasein*, in other words, is chosen to contrast in Kantian fashion with *Sosein*. The existential structure of that constitutes selfhood is not a 'Sosein' or multiply instantiable species-essence, precisely because it consists in a first-personal individuality, self-possession, or 'corpment' towards itself—or capacity for reflexive volitional relation¹⁶—that that no characterization in terms of a 'species' can capture.

Dasein's individual *existence*, however, Heidegger does not mean simply the *existentia* or an entity in the scholastic sense: something with *existentia* and no *Sosein* would be a bare entity without color or quality other than individuality. Rather, *existence* is distinctive of Dasein and positively characterizes it in much the same way as a 'what-it-is' or species-essence would, but the content of existence is unlike the content of species-essences or kinds. Existence in Heidegger's sense means a *freedom* lived temporally with others persons in a world of natural environments and artifacts:

Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence—in terms of a possibility of itself: to be itself or not itself. Dasein has either chosen these possibilities itself, or got itself into them, or grown up in them already. Only particular Dasein decides its existence, whether it does so by taking hold or neglecting. The question of existence never gets straightened out *except through existing itself*.¹⁷

For Heidegger, Dasein is faced with possibilities that are not yet closed or determined (or 'actualized' to speak Plantingian). Existence includes freedom in the sense that an individual's social identity and ultimate personal character are still open, and do not become finalized except through his or her own

¹⁵Ibid, ¶4, H12, p. 32-33; my italics.

¹⁶Ibid, ¶9, H42, pp. 67-8: As Heidegger says, 'That Being which is an *issue* for this entity in its very Being, is in each case mine. Thus Dasein is never to be taken ontologically as an instance or special case of some genus of entities...'

¹⁷Heidegger, H12, p.33: my italics.

(tacit or explicit) choices. Moreover, even the *range* of future possibilities for one's being is at least partially determined *existentially*, or *in time*, both by what the individual contingently inherits from the past and by their own response to these conditions.

This interpretation is confirmed in Heidegger's later *Letter on Humanism*, in which he makes clear that his focus on the *existence* of Dasein is not a simple reversal of Plato's doctrine that 'essentia precedes existentia.'¹⁸ In a look back at the crucial passage in *Being and Time*, Heidegger rephrases his earlier statement by saying that 'What man is..the 'essence' of man—lies in his ek-sistence.'¹⁹ 'Ek-sistence' here 'does not coincide with *existentia* in either form or content,' but means 'standing out into the truth of being;' by this enigmatic phrase, Heidegger means an irreducible capacity for awareness of *ontology*--an access to non-actualized possibilities and thus to the meaning of propositions with modal content--which comes from having an *actuality* that is fully real but does not consist of fully saturated states of affairs. This is unlike a species-essence, whose particular instantiations each express at most *one* of the various possible ways it can be instantiated; by contrast, ek-sistence is already actualized and individual, but it is *still* open to alternative possibilities. Thus when ek-sistence realizes some of its possibilities rather than others, no instantiation of ek-sistence is occurring. Ek-sistence, in other words, has the logically contingent actuality and particularity reserved in traditional metaphysics for *instantiations* of kinds or universals, but it also has the modal openness traditionally reserved for kinds or universals themselves. Thus ek-sistence 'can also never be thought of as a specific kind of living creature among others.'²⁰

¹⁸Martin Heidegger, 'Letter on Humanism,' tr. Frank A. Capuzzi & J. Glenn Gray, in Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David F. Krell (New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 208.

¹⁹Ibid, p. 205.

²⁰Ibid, p. 204.

Being open to ontological meaning is therefore not itself just another *kind* of being. Unlike entities that simply exemplify some kind-essence, Dasein never just has or exemplifies its being—rather, ek-sistence means necessarily being in active *relation* to one's own being, having to determine its own real character. Its access to the notion of its own unactualized possibilities, which arises from Dasein's freedom, is the core of Dasein's peculiar ontological self-relation and 'standing-out' from kind-exemplification, which also gives it the capacity to be aware of kinds and other ontological structures. By contrast, other creatures 'are as they are without standing outside their being as such..'; they are 'lodged in their respective environments but are never placed *freely* in the lighting of being..'²¹ Personhood therefore necessarily involves a volitional and cognitive openness of the *actual* person, *in time*, to alternative possibilities that are not metaphysically determined or closed by history.²²

From this brief overview, we can derive two *Heideggerian theses* that help define the Existentialist position. (1) Since free action is a possibility only for Dasein, there is no free action outside actual existence in time. (2) When one's practical essence or 'ultimate character' is determined, *eo ipso* one's ek-sistence or personhood itself has come to an end: therefore, even in the process of ek-sisting, one's ultimate character is not fixed or finalized until the process ends. These theses will form the basis for the Existentialist's strongest objections to Molinism.

III. A Preliminary Existentialist Objection to Molinism

²¹ibid, p.206; my italics.

²²In the *Letter on Humanism*, Heidegger is suspicious of "the personal" as a correct interpretation of Dasein or ek-sistence (see p. 207). But this is because he assuming that "person" will understood in a reductive traditional sense: if 'subject, person, or spirit' is treated as an extension of the rational soul as the 'specific difference' definitive of the human animal (p.203), then taking ek-sistence as personhood would be a way of illegitimately construing ek-sistence as a kind-essence. But by a *person*, I mean an individual being with an existential will and an irreducibly first-personal perspective, not a particular with a rational substance.

Modern analytic forms of Molinism naturally follow Luis de Molina's conception of God's middle knowledge, which Professor Thomas Flint has conveniently summarized as follows:

...for any person who does or might have existed, God, (being omniscient) would know, prior to any creative act on his part, what that person would freely do in any situation in which that person might be created and left free. Given his commitment to libertarianism, though, Molina also argued that the truths God would thus know—truths of the form "If person P were to be placed in circumstances C, P would freely do A"—would not be truths over which God had any control, despite the fact that such conditionals would be only contingently true.²³

For the Molinist, true counterfactuals of freedom are regarded as particular facts about individuals, which God does not *cause* but uses as the basis for his providential activity. Both the contingency of these truths and their *independence* from divine activity is crucial, because the Molinist wants to maintain that these truths are completely consistent with persons having the power to choose among alternatives in a robust sense. But in order to complete God's foreknowledge and guide the creation of the best *feasible* world, these truths about what a person would do in any situation must metaphysically precede their actual existence.

(A): The Preliminary Objection

The Existentialist is convinced that this picture of our freedom is fundamentally wrong, but it is far from easy to say precisely where the problem lies. My plan is to introduce an initial, largely intuitive objection, which will force us to clarify several of the key features of Molinist metaphysics. Only working through this process will reveal the element of Molinism to which the Existentialist's objection applies.

The initial objection is that intuitively, there is a certain loose analogy between the Molinist's

²³Thomas Flint, "Praying for Things to Have Happened," delivered at the University of Notre Dame, Spring 1994; mss p.5-6.

notion of *unfeasibility* and nomological or *causal necessity*.²⁴ A causally necessary truth is logically contingent, but its alternatives are not 'physically feasible.' The counterfactuals which give this truth its modal force are all *logically* contingent, but presumably true of our physical universe. In a similar fashion, true counterfactuals of freedom are logically contingent, but a complete set of them determines which logically possible (l.p.) worlds are *personally* feasible (or feasible given the free persons included in these worlds). Just as the sphere of l.p. worlds that are *physically* possible (relative to our universe) expresses certain *natural laws* of our universe,²⁵ in the same way, the sphere of l.p. worlds that are 'feasible' in the Molinist's sense might be thought to express certain 'laws' pertaining to the choices of each possible person. We could even say that the *logically* contingent truth about all a person's counterfactuals of freedom establishes another sort of modality (analogous to causal)—let us call it 'personal necessity' or *feasibility*—in which we could say that it is *personally necessary* that Curley would accept the \$20,000 bribe if offered it. It is *unfeasible* for Curley to refuse.

The idea behind this comparison is that feasibility in the Molinist sense, like causal possibility, refers to a kind of *synthetic modality* distinct from 'broadly logical modality.' Quine, of course, has made a famous attack on the Kantian distinction between 'analytic' and 'synthetic' which requires me to explain what I mean by a synthetic modality very clearly. While Kant's notion of 'analytic' may be inexact,²⁶ suppose we identify 'analyticity' with Plantinga's notion of *broadly*

²⁴An intuitive sense of this analogy, I think, must be what leads David Lewis to think in a complete Molinist conception, God would have "middle knowledge about chance systems other than free creatures, for instance, radium atoms.."(See David Lewis, "Evil For Freedom's Sake?," *Philosophical Papers*, Vol. XXII (1993), No. 3.; p.159).

²⁵For example, all the l.p. worlds in which some information-bearing process travels faster than light are 'physically unfeasible,' relative to our universe.

²⁶Actually, there are good grounds for asserting that what Kant meant by analyticity already was a modal

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logical necessity. Then a new definition of metaphysical *syntheticity*, analogous to Kant's old one, may be given: a proposition is synthetic if it is neither logically necessary (necessary_l) nor necessarily_l false (impossible). Given this reconstruction, Kant's characterization of 'metaphysical' truths as *synthetic and necessary* propositions can only mean that there are kind(s) of 'necessity' (or modal relevance) which are narrower in scope than broadly logical modality.²⁷ Just as the meaning of causal or physical possibility can be understood in terms of a 'sphere' of l.p. worlds (which excludes some l.p. worlds as physically impossible),²⁸ *feasibility* can be interpreted as referring to a proper subset of l.p. worlds.

It is perhaps easier to see the relevance of this modal interpretation of counterfactuals of freedom if we reflect on possible *patterns* of true counterfactuals of freedom that might show up across many or even all possible persons. An example of this would be what Plantinga calls "transworld depravity." If we admit the Molinist assertion that there is always a *truth of the matter* about what a person would do in each possible fully specified circumstance they could ever be in, it is a short step for Plantinga to assert that it is logically possible that for any world in which Curley is

²⁶(...continued)
conception of necessity. In paper on Frege's concepts of logical consistency and independence, Professor Patty Blanchete has shown that for Frege, the consistency of a set of sentences was not a model-theoretic notion, but an implicitly modal notion (Notre Dame, Presentation Nov.11, 19914). It is very likely that Frege's richer notion of 'analyticity' was precisely the one Kant had held.

²⁷ Quine's positivistic objection that concepts of synthetic modality are unclear is overcome by construing synthetic forms of modality this way. If one doubts that there are synthetic modalities in this *new sense*, at this point I simply urge that physical modality and Molinist feasibility are candidates, if we can provide an account of them. And since this is what I am examining, I ask that there be no positivistic foreclosure on the result in advance.

²⁸This idea of a Kripkean semantics for causal or 'nomological' modality has, of course, had many critics, such as Alexander Rosenberg and Norman Swartz. To answer their objections requires explaining how the *limitation on the range* of 'physically' possible worlds which is needed for such a semantics is grounded. Although I think this is far from impossible (and am working on such an account), for now it is sufficient if *the very notion* of a synthetic modality is clear enough, whether or not any such modality turns out to be well-grounded.

"significantly free" (or possesses negative liberty in the logical sense of having alternative possibilities), there are some choices with respect to which he would always go wrong, if placed in situations requiring him to make them.²⁹ This means that Curley is in what Plantinga calls *transworld depravity*: the worlds in which he never sins (or "goes wrong" in a morally significant free choice) are all *unfeasible* in the Molinist sense.¹⁹ If we accept that it is possible that "there be persons who suffer from transworld depravity" in this sense—a possibility which Plantinga considers "obvious"—then in addition "it is possible that everybody suffers from it,"²⁰ and even that the *essences* of all possible free agents could be in transworld depravity, in the sense that in the only l.p. worlds containing them that are in fact *creatable* by God, they would sin.²¹ In sum, it is logically possible that no feasible world is without sin.²² If this possibility were true, it would surely look and function very much like an empirical law for persons. Although it would be *logically* contingent, if such a 'general law of transworld depravity' were true, it would tell us something specific about the limits which determine the sphere of *feasible worlds*: namely that this sphere excludes logically possible worlds in which free persons are sinless. Within this sphere, we therefore have a *synthetic necessity*: it is unfeasible (or false in all feasible worlds) for any possible person to live a sinless life.

²⁹Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, p.47.

¹⁹Note that this does *not* mean that, in each logically possible world in which Curley exists, there is at least one situation requiring Curley to make a morally significant choice in which he goes wrong. Rather, if Curley exists in any logically possible world W1 in which he is sinless (which he surely does, for he is free with respect to each sin he commits), then there is at least one maximal world-segment representing a choice situation in W1, which is also a maximal segment in world W2 (with the difference that Curley does go wrong in W2), *and* if that maximal world segment became actual, he would do what he does in W2, not in W1.

²⁰Plantinga, p.48.

²¹Plantinga, p.53. *Creatable* in this sense is a synonym for 'weakly actualizable' or 'feasible.'

²²This much suffices to answer J.L. Mackie's argument against the Free Will defense, but to show that Molinism provides a logically possibility for explaining the *amount* of evil in the world, more is required (as the discussion of cosmology explains).

Since this claim extends beyond the range of all actual persons, it seems to have the sort of modal force which is usually thought distinguishes nomological necessities from mere empirical regularities.

The Molinist would surely argue against the analogy between contingently true causal laws and contingently true patterns of counterfactuals of freedom by insisting that these counterfactuals do not constrain the alternatives to which our free will is open, as causal laws do. God's knowledge of our counterfactuals of freedom does not constrain us because, as Tom Flint says, Molinism allows that we have "counterfactual power" over God's middle knowledge:

"..if I'm free, then I do have the power to do things such that, were I to do them, both God's middle knowledge and his simple foreknowledge would be different." ²³

But this power to bring about *logically* possible alternatives is somewhat deceiving, because according to Molinism, it is *bound* (in a nearly 'nomic' sense) to remain unused. There is no *real* possibility—possibility in a synthetic sense distinct from logical possibility—of my now exercising my so-called "power" to do things such that, were I to do them, what God foreknows would be different. The reason is simple: God's middle knowledge (as part of his foreknowledge) is based on a set of facts which is metaphysically prior to my being actualized as a real person in an actual, temporal world. Whatever I do here is posterior to the facts that determined God's middle knowledge. Thus, by the same token, what I do *as an actual person* is also metaphysically posterior to God's middle knowledge. In *this* respect, then, Professor Flint's so-called "power" is like my power to do things such that, were I to do them, the laws of nature would be other than they are: in other words, it is rather ephemeral at best. Flint admits as much when he notes that for the Molinist, God's middle knowledge is not *causally* dependent on any of our actions: rather, "our actions are causally dependent on God's decision to create us in the circumstances in which those actions are

²³Flint, "Praying for Things to Have Happened," mss. p.8.

performed."²⁴ The sense in which I lack the power to do otherwise, then, is something analogous to nomological impossibility. This comparison of Molinist 'feasibility' to causal modality depends, of course, on idea that there can be *real* (not merely conceptual) kinds of modality more restricted in scope than logical possibility.

(B) The Haskar/Adams Anti-Molinist Strategy and the Molinist Response

This preliminary Existentialist objection to Molinism, however, is quite similar to other critiques which Molinists have insisted they can meet. In his *God, Time, and Knowledge*, William Haskar published an argument against Molinism²⁵ which can be summarized as follows: (1) the truth of an individual person's counterfactuals of freedom are *prior*, in some important sense, to their powers of agency; hence (2) because the truth of a counterfactual of freedom necessitates the action it predicts if its antecedent conditions are actualized, an individual in a choice circumstance is not free to act contrary to his or her counterfactual of freedom for that circumstance. In his own "Anti-Molinist Argument," Robert Adams praises Haskar's line of reasoning and portrays his own argument as a "recasting of Haskar's."²⁶ Like Adams, I am convinced that Haskar's intuition is on

²⁴Flint, mss. p.7. In fairness to Flint, later in the paper he openly recognizes the limits of the this counterfactual power by distinguishing between *weak* counterfactual power over the past (which is ephemeral in the way indicated) and *strong* counterfactual power over the past, which is realized in counterfactuals with incomplete conditionals excluding, at least, the relevant fact about the past. Flint admits that only such strong counterfactual power could be relevant for the practice of praying. The problem, however, is that no matter how much is left out of the conditional, the Molinist only has two alternatives: either in the circumstance as incompletely specified, there is *no* fact about what agent A would do, or there is a *set fact* about what that agent would do—which again is not a fact they can change. Thus whether it is possible to maintain the existence of any strong counterfactual powers that do not ultimately reduce to weak or 'ephemeral' powers in a traditional Molinist system remains controversial at best.

²⁵William Haskar, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), pp. 29-52.

²⁶Robert M. Adams, "An Anti-Molinist Argument" in *Philosophical Perspectives, 5: Philosophy of Religion*, 1991, ed. James E. Tomberlin (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview, 1991); p. 346.

the right track and locates the essential reason why Existentialists, like many others, cannot accept Molinism.

But there have been qualms about the strength of Haskar's proof. In a recent article, William Lane Craig reiterates his opinion that Haskar's argument rests on the "clearly false" premise "that on the Molinist view, counterfactuals of freedom are more fundamental features of the world than categorical facts."²⁷ Craig can make this objection because the kind of "priority" enjoyed by counterfactuals freedom, which allegedly makes individual agents unfree with respect to them, is quite unclear. As Adams suggests, the first stage of the argument is to show that "created, supposedly free agents do not bring about the truth of counterfactuals of freedom about them, if Molinism is true."²⁸ As an alternative to Haskar's own argument for this, Adams proposes to use "the idea of explanatory priority" to make clearer the sense in which the truth of counterfactuals of freedom is prior to the agent's actions.²⁹ The second stage is to argue "that it follows that such agents do not have the power to act otherwise than they in fact do."³⁰ But even supposing we have completed the first stage, Adams identifies several premises in Haskar's subsequent inference that agents lack the power to do otherwise than their counterfactuals of freedom dictate. One premise is that "for Molinism, it is a necessary truth that every counterfactual of freedom whose consequent is true is true."³¹ As Adams says, it would be hard for the Molinist to do without this presupposition, but a more controversial premise is:

...Haskar's assumption that if Molinism implies, as he says, that we *do not* bring about

²⁷William Lane Craig, "Robert Adams's New Anti-Molinist Argument," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. LIV, No. 4 (December, 1994), p.857.

²⁸Adams, "An Anti-Molinist Argument," p.348.

²⁹Adams, "An Anti-Molinist Argument," p.346.

³⁰Adams, "An Anti-Molinist Argument," p.348.

³¹Adams, "An Anti-Molinist Argument," p.348.

the truth of counterfactuals of freedom about us, it also implies that we do not have the *power* to bring about their truth. The assumption is plausible, but I am not sure it has been proved.³²

Let me dub this the 'Power Inference Principle' (since Adams does not name it). In my own view, the problem with this assumption is that the Molinist can always insist that we have this power in the weak sense that alternative actions are *logically possible* for us in a given choice-circumstance. This response to the Power Inference Principle (PIP) is damning because Haskar's overall argument is an attempt to show that the metaphysical priority of the truth of counterfactuals of freedom conflicts with our *logical* possibility of doing otherwise. Thus the inference from our not bringing about the truth of our counterfactuals of freedom to our lacking the power to do so tacitly assumes the crucial point.

What this shows, I think, is not that Haskar's proof strategy simply needs emending, but rather than the goal of his anti-Molinist critique needs to be reconceived. What we need to show is not that Molinism implies that we lack the *logical* possibility of doing otherwise, but rather that it implies a different sort of powerlessness. In my development of the Existentialist's 'preliminary objection,' I already suggested that it must be in something analogous to a *nomological* or causal sense that true counterfactuals of our freedom prevent us from doing otherwise. Developing this intuition will both help us clarify the type of 'priority' which the truth of counterfactuals of freedom have, and open up what I think is a better way of pressing Haskar's anti-Molinist intuition.

Adams, however, believes he can construct an alternative anti-Molinist argument *without* Haskar's conclusion that "it follows from Molinism...that we do not bring about the truth of an counterfactuals of freedom about us."³³ Adams's argument begins as follows:

³²Adams, "An Anti-Molinist Argument," p.349.

³³Adams, "An Anti-Molinist Argument," p.347. This is conclusion "(9)" of Adams's "first stage of the argument." In this argument, Adams attempts to show how he can justify Haskar's conclusion in nine steps, using
(continued...)

- (1) According to Molinism, the truth of all true counterfactuals of freedom about us is explanatorily prior to God's decision to create us.
- (2) God's decision to create us is explanatorily prior to our existence.
- (3) Our existence is explanatorily prior to all of our choices and actions.
- (4) The relation of explanatory priority is transitive.
- (5) Therefore, it follows from Molinism (by 1-4) that the truth of all counterfactuals of freedom about us is explanatorily prior to our choices and actions.³⁴

Adams then skips his steps (6)-(9), which constitute the argument for Haskar's conclusion, and continues with six more steps of his own, beginning with

- (10) It also follows from Molinism that if I freely do action A in circumstances C, then there is a true counterfactual of freedom F* which says that if I were in C, then I would (freely) do A.³⁵

Since from (5) it follows that (11) "the truth of F* is explanatorily prior to my choosing and acting as I do in C," and since (13), "the truth of F* ..is strictly inconsistent with my refraining from doing A in C," I am compelled by F* to do A in C in a way that is incompatible with my libertarian freedom:

- (15) "if Molinism is true, then I do not freely do A in C," which is a *reductio* of Molinism.³⁶ To

reach this conclusion, Adams only needs the conception of freedom in the following premise:

- (12) If I freely do A in C, no truth that is strictly inconsistent with my refraining from A in C is explanatorily prior to my choosing and acting as I do in C.

As Adams explains, this premise is supposed to capture freedom in the "incompatibilist sense," and its implication is that "the totality of my action in situation C" must be the *first thing* in the order of

³³(...continued)

his own idea of explanatory priority. But then, to avoid depending on the premise that "(6) The relation of explanatory priority is asymmetrical," Adams develops a different argument against Molinism, starting from the same steps (1)-(5), but not going through the Haskarian conclusion (9).

³⁴Adams, "An Anti-Molinist Argument," p.346. Adams reiterates these steps on page 349 as the beginning of his new argument.

³⁵Adams, "An Anti-Molinist Argument," p.349. However, Adams should really have said that if I do A in a *maximally specified circumstance C*, then Molinism implies a counterfactual such as F*.

³⁶Adams, "An Anti-Molinist Argument," p.350.

explanation which logically excludes my acting otherwise.³⁷

The basic problem with Adams's approach is that the notion of "explanatory priority" is too vague a concept to capture precisely the metaphysical priority that the truth of our counterfactuals of freedom seems to have on the Molinist account. As a result, William Lane Craig has been able to challenge Adams's argument as using "equivocal" senses of "explanatory priority."³⁸ Craig argues that explanatory priority in Adams's (2) and (3) is "metaphysical" necessity, but the truth of our counterfactuals of freedom is required *in the same sense* by God's decision to create us:

The root of the difficulty seems to be a conflation of reasons and causes on Adam's part. The priority in (2) and (3) is a sort of causal or ontic priority, but the priority in (1) is not causal or ontic, since the truth of all counterfactuals of creaturely freedom is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition of God's decision to create us.³⁹

Craig also charges, somewhat obscurely, that the sense of explanatory priority in Adams's inference (5) is different still.⁴⁰ Finally, Craig also charges that Adams's premise (12) is false, because the explanatory priority of my counterfactual of freedom does not entail my powerlessness to alter it:

Though F* is (*ex concessio*) in fact explanatorily prior to my freely doing A in C, it is within my power to refrain from doing A in C; only if I were to do so, F* would not then be explanatorily prior to my action nor a part of God's middle knowledge.⁴¹

Although Craig does not say in what sense it remains "within my power" in C to alter the

³⁷Adams, "An Anti-Molinist Argument," p.350.

³⁸Craig, "Robert Adams's New Anti-Molinist Argument," p.858.

³⁹Craig, p.859.

⁴⁰Craig develops a parallel line of reasoning, starting from the premise that "A*. If children were born to us, they would come to love God." If such a counterfactual is true, and is the basis for the his decision to have children, then it ends up that "The truth of (A*) is explanatorily prior to our children's coming to love God" (Craig, p.860). Craig complains that he cannot even understand the sense of "explanatory priority" in this sentence. But is this the anti-Molinist's fault, as Craig seems to assume? The Existentialist has a ready explanation for why an incomprehensible explanatory priority is entailed by A*: it is because the truth of a counterfactual such as A*, prior to the existence and free choices of Craig's children, *itself* makes no sense! If the senselessness of the premise is carried through to the conclusion, this is the Molinist's fault.

⁴¹Craig, p.860.

counterfactual of my freedom which truly describes what I would do in C, presumably he means that it is still *logically* possible for me to do so. In this second objection, Craig is trying to show that the inference Adams's wants to draw from his premise (12) implicitly requires Haskar's conclusion that the person's choice mentioned in the consequent of the counterfactual of freedom cannot be what actually brings about the truth of the counterfactual. Only if it is not within my power to bring about the truth of my counterfactuals of freedom, could we be assured that their (*alleged*) explanatory priority makes it logically impossible for me to do otherwise. Thus Craig's second objection forces Adams's case against Molinism to depend once again on Haskar's conclusion that we do not cause the truth of our counterfactuals, and his 'Power Inference Principle.' Without these, Adams will not be able to show that Molinism contradicts our logical possibility of doing otherwise. Craig is satisfied to hang on this Molinist libertarian power—ephemeral though it actually is.

Ultimately, I think Adams's new anti-Molinist argument leaves space for these countermoves because it does not give a clear enough account of the 'special priority' which counterfactuals of freedom must have to be of any use to divine providence: taking this status as an *explanatory priority* leads Adams to try to show that the truth of my counterfactual of freedom makes it *logically* impossible to do otherwise. The only way to put a permanently stop to the Molinist's dance back and forth between allowing priority to counterfactuals of freedom (when talking about providence) and then refusing them priority (when talking about freedom) is to develop Adams's and Haskar's insight a different way.

The Existentialist's alternative strategy also has two stages: to analyze Molinist feasibility as a type of *synthetic modality*, and then to make clear that the synthetic necessity of counterfactuals of freedom is *already* enough to cancel moral responsibility for one's actions, no matter what ephemeral powers of doing otherwise might remain. Specifically, the type of "explanatory priority" which the truth of counterfactuals of freedom have for God, as in Adams's premise (1), must be interpreted as a

kind of *necessity* which is independent of God's will. Moreover, although these truths are not *causally* prior to God's decision to create us, *in themselves* they are already analogous to causal necessities which restrict God's options. God's decision to create us may not be necessitated by these truths, but in analogous fashion, the laws of nature may also be neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for my dropping this penny: nevertheless, these laws are still metaphysically prior to my actions, since they *necessitate certain consequences* of whatever I do. Analogously, it is deceptive for Craig to suggest that the truth of counterfactuals of freedom serve *only as reasons* for God's decisions: Molinism very clearly implies that these truths also *determine* what the consequences of creating free creatures in different situations will be. In fact, it is precisely these *real determinations* which serve the Divine intellect as reasons. The Existentialist's objective will be to show that the synthetic necessity established by true counterfactuals of freedom is incompatible with moral responsibility, *even if it is compatible with the logical possibility of doing otherwise*. The first step for the Existentialist is therefore to explain what it means for the truths of middle knowledge to constitute a kind of synthetic modality.

(C): A Theory of Synthetic Modalities and the Truths of Middle Knowledge

To say that the Molinist power to do otherwise is "ephemeral" is *not* to accuse the Molinist of contradicting the *logical conditions* of contingency required for libertarian free will. The Existentialist's objections to Molinism do not rest on the misunderstanding that the truth of an individual's counterfactuals of freedom are part of their logical *essence*, which would leave them only *nominal* power to bring about different alternatives. But the fact that the Molinist position is so often misunderstood this way is not an accident, and I think it reveals something interesting about Molinism. For example, Plantinga's notion of transworld depravity as a possible pattern of true counterfactuals of freedom lends itself to this common misreading of Molinism, because Plantinga

makes it sound as if it is a person's *essence* by itself which accounts for their transworld depravity. Because he describes individual essences themselves as depraved, it would be natural to interpret Plantinga as meaning that the truth of certain counterfactuals of freedom (those ensuring transworld depravity) is *essential* to the person—i.e. true in every possible world in which the person exists.⁴²

But in fact, Molinism does not hold this: rather, to remain officially consistent with libertarian freedom, it allows that in world W', in which Curley does not take the \$20,000 bribe, what Curley *would* have done (his counterfactuals of freedom) is *also* different.⁴³ A person's counterfactuals of freedom themselves must all be (logically) contingent properties of that person, according to Molinism.⁴⁴ This point, which I will call *Flint's axiom*, is a corrective to the misunderstanding that an individual's counterfactuals of freedom are logically *essential* to him in the *de re* sense. The truths of a person's counterfactuals of freedom are thus not a function of their logical identity alone, since the same person exists with the same logical identity in worlds in which he has different counterfactuals of freedom.

Flint's axiom, however, naturally engenders a new misunderstanding of its own. The problem is that contingency normally means simply being true at some logically possible worlds, and false at others. We may think of contingent truth as truth *with respect to* a set of logically possible worlds, or truth that is *world-relative*.⁴⁵ Although an individual's counterfactuals of freedom

⁴²For Plantinga, *essence* is defined in terms of truth *at* every world in which the entity exists, i.e. in terms of a sum of what I am now calling world-relative truths (Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*: p.70 and p.77).

⁴³In W', he *would* take the bribe, because he *does* in W'. We could even say that *at* W', Curley has a whole set of counterfactuals of freedom that are true *relative* to W'.

⁴⁴In other words, the individual's counterfactuals of freedom are contingent in the *de re* sense, not only in the *de dicto* sense. I am indebted to Tom Flint for clarification of this point.

⁴⁵Of course, logically necessary truths can strictly be considered true relative to worlds—but in this case, the relativity is dispensable, since they are true at *every* l.p. world. At whichever one becomes *the* actual world (assuming actuality is not simply indexical), the necessary truth will be true.

certainly are contingent in this sense, the *truth* of those counterfactuals of freedom that become part of God's middle knowledge, cannot be said to be contingent in precisely this simple sense. Flint's axiom is deceptive to the extent that it makes it sound as if the truth of an individual's counterfactuals of freedom is a world-relative truth for the Molinist. We can say that (β') *Curley would refuse the bribe in C* is true with respect to W' (and would be true if W' were actualized), and (β) *Curley would accept the bribe in C* is true with respect to W (and would be true if W were actualized), but the Molinist claims that there is an additional fact which breaks this nice symmetry: namely, that Curley in fact would take the bribe. (β) is true *simpliciter*, and not just with respect to W. That is why actualizing W' is unfeasible: the counterfactual of freedom β' which would be true if that world were actualized, is *in fact* false. But is this just because W has been actualized instead? Certainly not, for this truth has metaphysical priority in the following precise sense: β is true *prior to the actualization of any single, maximally complete, logically possible world*.

This makes more explicit how the explanatory priority enjoyed by the truths of middle knowledge must function according to Molinism. The Molinist claims that counterfactuals of an individual's freedom can be true in a *world-neutral* sense,⁴⁶ where 'world-neutral' is the complementary property to 'world-relative' as used above. Counterfactual β is true of Curley, not merely *at W* or relative to W, but *simpliciter*. And it is this "fact" that determines that *only* l.p. worlds (including W) for which β is true in the world-relative sense can be *feasible*.⁴⁷ By 'world-

⁴⁶In earlier drafts, I had used the term "world-independent" instead, but in discussion, Alvin Plantinga objected that this implied that there could be propositions which are true, but at *no* logically possible world—which of course is nonsense. By world-neutral truths, I clearly mean propositions whose truth precedes the actualization of any of the *particular* logically possible worlds at which they are true in the world-relative sense, not propositions that are true despite being *impossible*.

⁴⁷Whether they are feasible, of course, depends on all the true counterfactuals of freedom. To find the feasible worlds, we take each true counterfactual of freedom C*, find the worlds at which C* is true in the world-relative sense, and then derive the intersection set of these sets of worlds. The feasible worlds are those in which every

(continued...)

neutral,' I do not mean that counterfactuals of freedom such as β are true at *no l.p. world* (which would mean that they are logically *impossible*), nor that they are true at *every world* (which would make them necessary). Rather, I mean that the truth of β , for example, is independent of the actuality of *any particular complete l.p. world* out of the l.p. worlds at which β is true in the world-relative sense. World neutral truths are prior *in actuality* to a maximal state of affairs, or to the truth of a maximal proposition (or whatever we take a logically possible world to be).⁴⁸

And this is what makes Molinism so liable to be misunderstood. In S5 modal semantics, we normally think of a truth about an entity as either logically *essential* to that entity, or logically contingent for it, i.e. true only *at certain worlds* in which it exists. But the Molinist implies, without fully clarifying it, that there is an *intermediate* ontological status truths about entities can have. There are some truths which are *contingent* in the *de re* sense, because they do not hold for the entity in *every world* in which it exists, but which are nevertheless true in the 'world-neutral' sense. These counterfactuals of freedom are true *simpliciter*, but their world-neutrality does not mean that they are logically *essential* to the individual: rather, they are neutral among a sphere of l.p. worlds, which must *exclude* some l.p. worlds in which the individual exists⁴⁹ but has different counterfactuals of freedom, and would act differently in the same circumstances. For example, although the truth of β is neutral among the worlds at which Curley exists and takes the bribe in C, but it unactualizable the

⁴⁷(...continued)
counterfactual of freedom which is true *simpliciter*, is also true in the world-relative sense.

⁴⁸This theory is neutral between most 'ersatz' metaphysical interpretations of the logically possible worlds needed for Kripke-style modal semantics, but it does presuppose some version of "actualism" about possible worlds, whatever they are. If David Lewis is right that all the l.p. worlds are equally actual, or each actual-at-themselves in the same way as every other, then *eo ipso* there can be no world-neutral truths of the kind required for Molinist unfeasibility, or *any* kind of real synthetic modality, to exist.

⁴⁹Because Molinism insists on the individuals's logical possibility of doing otherwise.

(non-empty) set of logically possible worlds in which Curley exists and refuses the bribe in C;⁵⁰ so β is *world-neutrally true* for Curley, although it is not logically essential to him.

This interpretation implies that transworld depravity is also more complex notion than it might appear to be. Speaking rigorously, we should really say that a person's essence contributes to such depravity only by telling us all the sets of choice-circumstances a person would face in all the possible worlds in which they exist. These sets will differ in each world, despite overlaps.⁵¹ But if we index to each l.p. world the set of choices an individual faces in that world, then the set of these world-indexed sets is essential to the person. This is all the person's essence by itself gets us—it does not by itself tell us that the person is "depraved." For in fact, in the *world-relative* sense, it is not true that he behaves depravedly in every l.p. world. Rather, it is the 'intermediate' *contingent but world-neutral truths* of his counterfactuals of the freedom that determine that in every logically compossible set of world-choices of the agent, there are some choices (at least one) in which he would go wrong. It is not really his essence, but his unique set of world-neutral truths about what he would do, which is 'depraved.'

The Molinist is thus an *actualist* about an individual's counterfactuals of freedom (*henceforth, c.o.fs*). A given individual has exactly one consistent set of these c.o.fs that are all *true* for him, in the *world-neutral* sense, in *any world*. In other words, while β ' is true for Curley *at W'*, this possible counterfactual of freedom β' is nevertheless *false* in quite another world-neutral sense, which is precisely what makes W' unactualizable. Only when one grasps this does the full strangeness of the Molinist's position become apparent. While the Molinist says that an agent has different c.o.fs in worlds W and W', he cannot *only* mean that one set of c.o.fs would be true if W'

⁵⁰ β is also of course compatible with worlds in which Curley exists but is never in C, and with worlds in which Curley does not exist at all.

⁵¹Note that even though W' and W share the maximally specified choice circumstance S, in W Curley will face some choices as a *result* of taking the bribe which he cannot face in W'.

were actual, while another set of c.o.fs would be true if W were actual. While it may be true that if W' were actual, a different set of c.o.fs would be true for Curley, there are facts (unusual, world-neutral ones) that privilege one set of Curley's c.o.fs as *the true* set for Curley. Which set of c.o.fs this is does not depend merely on which complete logically possible world is actualized. Rather, Molinism insists that it is the other way around: which logically possible worlds *can* be actualized depends on what these world-neutral truths are.

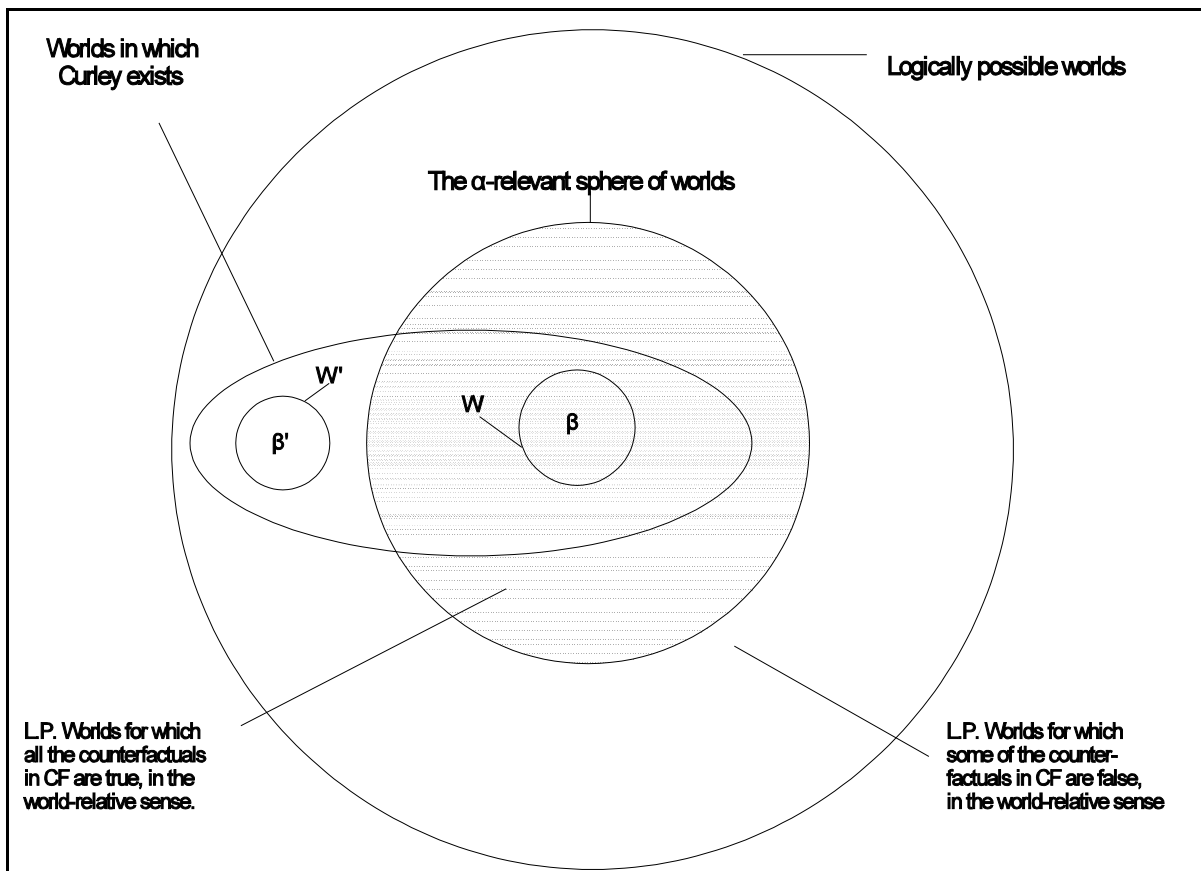
As a result, the Molinist *cannot* mean that the true set of c.o.fs about Curley is simply the set that *happens* to be true in α (Plantinga's rigid designator for whichever complete l.p. world turns out to be instantiated as the actual world).⁵² Rather, which set of Curley's c.o.fs is true in the privileged, world-neutral sense determines which logically possible worlds *even could* become α . A set of Curley's c.o.fs is true, prior to the *complete* actualization of any maximal logically possible world.

If we like, instead of a *truth* about Curley, we can interpret a true counterfactual of his freedom as a *subjunctive state of affairs* 'S' (something like 'Curley's would-doing A were C actual'), which *obtains*, or is *contingently actual*, 'prior' to the complete actualization of any l.p. world. This 'priority' itself is still primitive or undefined, but at the moment, we are only concerned with how it functions in Molinism. In practice, the 'priority' enjoyed by a subjunctive state of affairs such as 'S' means that it does not entail the actuality of a *single* possible world, but it does entail that l.p. worlds in which Curley exists and does not do A in C cannot be α . For with 'S', the state of affairs corresponding to β , we already have a *piece* of α —a piece that *is actual* 'prior' to the rest of α . Thus α cannot turn out to be a world that does not include 'S.' The real implication of Molinism is that there is a set of c.o.fs for every possible person like Curley, which is determined from all time to be a *segment of* α . Yet the actuality of all the subjunctive states of affairs corresponding to all the true

⁵² α here is understood as a *logically possible* world in the ersatz sense, as distinct from a physical universe. α is just the logically possible world that happens to be instantiated or actualized.

counterfactuals of freedom put together does not pick out a complete logically possible world: thus taken together, the truths of counterfactuals of freedom is still neutral among many logically possible world.

Let us call this set of truths CF. We could think of those l.p. worlds which contain CF (or which contain nothing whose contrary is entailed by CF) as ' α -relevant' in the following sense: those worlds remain *candidates* for becoming α . This is what feasibility in the Molinist sense means: it is a *relevance* notion, since it refers to a particular kind of relevance which *some* logically possible worlds have. We can think of this relevance as a property which 'colors' a *sphere* of logically possible worlds. This 'sphere of relevance' is established by the world-neutral truths of CF, or the actuality of the subjunctive states of affairs corresponding to them. The metaphysical priority of CF, which I said consisted in the notion that the truth of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are given prior to the truth of a complete l.p. world, can thus be translated as follows: the α -relevance of a certain sphere of l.p. worlds *metaphysically precedes* the actuality of a single l.p. worlds as α . The determination (by God and natural chance, or whatever) of which l.p. world is instantiated as α is thus *conditioned* by the α -relevance of our sphere of worlds. The results can be represented in the following diagram (appearing on the next page).



This model helps us understand why Molinism ought to be interpreted as implying the existence of a kind of synthetic modality. If there is *any* kind of *real* synthetic modality, i.e. a modality narrower in scope than logical possibility that refers to distinctions that are not simply a result of our language, our ideals of economy in theoretical systems, and so on, such a synthetic modality *could only* arise on the sort of ontological ground we are considering here. For some real synthetic form of modality 'K' to exist, there has to be a logically sub-maximal set of states of affairs (in the case of Molinism, those corresponding to CF), whose *actuality* has some sort of 'metaphysical priority' (either primitive or to be interpreted in some way) relative to the actuality of α —the complete logically possible world that is uniquely actual on 'actualist' interpretations of the metaphysics of modality. The *prior actuality* of this set of states of affairs grounds the relevance of the 'sphere of worlds' which gives meaning to the K-kind of synthetic modality. We can then say that propositions that are true throughout this 'sphere' are K-necessary, those that are true in *some* worlds

in this sphere are K-possible, and those that are false in every world in the 'sphere' are K-impossible.

A synthetic modality with this type of metaphysical structure is not merely 'conceptual:' it would be better described as *existential*, since the relevance of the sphere of worlds that give the synthetic modality its *sense* arises from the privileged existence of a certain set of states of affairs. The notion that any such kinds of real synthetic modality exist may seem wild or even scandalous to some readers,⁵³ but it must be admitted that the idea makes sense, *if* we can credit that the truth of some propositions (or the actuality of corresponding states of affairs) may be 'prior' in some atemporal, non-causal sense, to the actuality of an entire possible world. The crucial point is that *Molinism itself implies* such an account of the truths of middle knowledge when it lets these truths restrict the states of affairs it is possible for God to actualize. All my model does is show why the special priority, or world-neutrality, which Molinism thus gives to the truth of some counterfactuals of freedom inevitably establishes a form of synthetic modality: a *real* form of synthetic modality *just is* a sense of modal quantification made relevant by the α -relevance of a sphere of l.p. worlds. Whether he likes it or not, the Molinist *cannot avoid* the implication that 'feasibility' in his sense is a synthetic modality in my sense.

This theory of synthetic modalities is bound to seem unfamiliar for a straightforward historical reason. The type of sub-maximal actuality which ground a kind of α -relevance of a sphere of worlds and thus provides the semantic basis for a synthetic modality therefore ruptures both of the standard conceptions of actuality available until now in the metaphysics of modality. On the one hand, David Lewis's 'possibilist' conception implies that every (concrete) l.p. world is equally 'actual.'

⁵³To any reader with Quinean scruples, broadly logical modality, logical essences and so on, are already bad enough. To add to this real synthetic modalities may seem like a final step to far. But my aim at this point is not to insist that any real synthetic modalities exist—it is only to claim that *the very idea* makes sense. In fact, Molinist 'feasibility' is useful to the extent that it has given us an example of the *general structure* which real synthetic modalities must have.

On the other hand, Alvin Plantinga's theory holds that a *single* (ersatz) l.p. world is uniquely actualized.⁵⁴ If these extremes represent an exclusive alternative, then the paradigm case of actuality is either (1) an indexical property shared throughout the sphere of l.p. worlds, or (2) the complete actuality of a single possible world α . But it is the exclusiveness of this alternative which my theory of synthetic modalities challenges. If synthetic modalities exist, then the paradigm case of actuality is the existence of *sub-maximal* states of affairs, which determine the α -relevance of a limited sphere of l.p. worlds. This is the deepest intuition at work in the theory—a conception of actuality which succumbs neither to Lewis's nor Plantinga's extreme alternatives.⁵⁵ And more importantly, whether they like it or not, their conception of feasibility already implicitly commits Molinists to the coherence of such this 'third' conception of primordial actuality.

Once we grasp this, it is easy to see why the comparison of feasibility to causal or nomological modality is so intuitive. If Molinism is true, then there is some sense of metaphysical priority which allows for 'world-neutral' truths, and hence by parity of reason it will also be possible to interpret nomological modality as a 'kind' of *synthetic modality* in my sense. Imagine that instead of CF, we have a set of indeterministic natural laws L which are true in a world-neutral sense, like

⁵⁴See, for example, Alvin Plantinga, "Actualism and Possible Worlds," originally published in *Theoria* 42 (1976); reprinted in *The Possible and the Actual*, ed. Michael J. Loux (Cornell University Press, 1979), pp. 253-273. Plantinga explicitly defines "actualism" as "the view that there neither are nor could have been nonexistent objects" (p.257). He also affirms that actuality is a more basic notion than "inclusion in the actual world" (p.258), which would seem to open the door to the sort of actuality of sub-maximal states of affairs which I am proposing. But in fact, 'the actual' is implicitly conceived to be maximal, so that it always constitutes the "domain of α " (p.268).

⁵⁵Ultimately, I believe it is this notion of actuality which is integral to Kant's conception of metaphysics, which is inherited in large part by the existentialists. Therefore it should not be surprising that existentialists generally take the existence of submaximal states of affairs, such as those constituting *time*, to be more primordial than the complete actuality of a logical construct, such as a possible world. To the existentialist, actuality is always a *fragment*. Plantinga's conception of actuality gives priority to a deceptive abstraction, while Lewis's levels off the entire significance of 'actuality' as a *mode* distinct from 'possibility.'

truths of middle knowledge, due to the metaphysical 'priority' of their truth to the full actuality of α . Since they are indeterministic, the physical universe these laws constitute will exist in a plurality of logically possible worlds. The 'sphere' of worlds in which L is satisfied thus becomes the 'modal range' for nomological possibility. Events such as exceeding the speed of light, for example, will only exist in worlds outside the α -relevant sphere L establishes, and so such an event will be *physically impossible* for this universe. Although I think this way of conceiving causal modality has much to recommend it on its own terms, my only point here is that such an interpretation of causal possibility has the *same* sort of metaphysical basis as Molinist feasibility.

Someone is bound to object that I still have not explained this "metaphysical priority" that some *segments* of α enjoy over the complete actuality of α itself, when they constitute the modal range for a synthetic modality. But the Existentialist is willing to let the Molinist's account of God's providence and middle knowledge decide exactly what this metaphysical precedence means. It is sufficient that the Molinist account implies that there is *some* type of priority P, such that the α -relevance of a sphere of l.p. worlds is 'P-prior' to God's decision to actualize a single possible world as α . As Craig indicates, 'P' cannot be a *causal* priority, but beyond that it does not matter to the Existentialist what P is, as long as the Molinist considers it sufficient to make it impossible for God to actualize a world that is not α -relevant. The Existentialist is only interested in the *formal features* which result from P-priority being attributed to the truth of a logically sub-maximal set propositions. For whatever P is, the P-priority of such a set of propositions (counterfactual or otherwise) will establish a kind of synthetic modality, as explained. And this synthetic modality acts as a *real constraint* on God's creative decision, even if it does not *cause* any particular divine decision. It makes certain creative actions (such as actualizing W' in which Curley refuses the bribe) *synthetically impossible* for God. And for this to be the case, the synthetic modality must exist P-prior to the existence of particular free creatures. This is as much as the Existentialist will need to

demonstrate the untenability of the Molinist position.⁵⁶

(D) The Truths of Middle Knowledge as 'Hard Facts'

As a result of our analysis of Molinist 'feasibility' as a kind of synthetic modality, we can locate the sense in which the truths of middle knowledge are '*hard facts*' relative to the choices they entail when a person is actualized in a given circumstance. In his objection to premise (12) of Adams's "New Anti-Molinist Argument," Craig urges that Adams has not shown that "the content of God's middle knowledge is a 'hard fact.'"⁵⁷ Yet divine middle knowledge about me includes only world-neutrally true counterfactual of freedom such as γ , which says that 'JD would do A in C.' It is

⁵⁶ The Existentialist, incidentally, cannot object to the very notion of real synthetic modalities in the sense I have described. The basis of her objection to Molinism cannot be simply that the Molinist must hold that there is some metaphysical 'priority' which makes world-neutral truths conceivable. For the Existentialist herself actually requires some such 'priority' with a *continuum* of ordinal positions. The reason is that Existentialism maintains that at *any point in real time* in which free beings are actualized, only a fragment of α is actualized; which single and complete logically possible world turns out to be '*the*' actual world is determined only *internally within actual time itself*, both by physical chances and choices ultimately rooted in spontaneity. The Existentialist is committed to holding that as a matter of fact, there is no maximal, logically possible 'world-proposition' whose truth is metaphysically prior to the actual unfolding of time and collapsing of its wavepackets and 'choicepackets' (if you'll pardon the phrase) in any partially-actualized physical universe that exists.

In my model, what is *actual* at each point in time, as conceived by the Existentialist, is a set of world-neutral truths that 'color' a certain plurality of l.p. worlds as α -relevant. At each subsequent point, the 'sphere' of the α -relevant worlds has grown smaller. Time is thus a continuum of synthetic ranges of possibility, in which the 'past' states of affairs ever more narrowly restrict the range of the 'temporally possible' in the future. The 'truth' of propositions is thus literally time-indexed for the Existentialist, which explains why for her, there can *as yet* be no truth or falsehood for contingent propositions about the future. All states of affairs whose 'actuality' is metaphysically prior to the present actualities exist in whatever l.p. world turns out to be actual, but they underdetermine it. The *eventual* actuality of that maximal, l.p. world, including the actual future of our universe, is posterior to and dependent on the unfolding actuality of sub-maximal parts of it we already have. This radically metaphysical interpretation of time thus depends on the same idea of metaphysical priority and world-neutral truth as does the Molinist's account of the truths of divine middle knowledge.

⁵⁷Craig, p.860.

the world-neutrality of this truth which makes it *unfeasible* for me to refrain from doing A in C.

Thus:

- (1) γ is a truth of middle knowledge.
- (2) It is unfeasible for God to actualize an l.p. world in which JD refrains from doing A in C, i.e. it is unfeasible for God to make γ false (follows from 1 according to Molinism).
- (3) The truth of γ is P-prior⁵⁸ to the complete actualization of α (interpretation of 2).
- (4) The proposition E, which says "JD does A in C," is true (supposition).
- (5) It is feasible for God to refrain from creating JD (according to Molinism).
- (6) It is unfeasible for JD not to exist and for JD to do A in C (logical impossibility entails unfeasibility, although not the reverse).
- (7) Hence it is feasible for God to make E false (from 5 & 6).
- (8) Hence E is true only *relative* to α , not P-prior to the complete actualization of α (interpretation of 7).⁵⁹

Notice that (8) interprets (7) by the same criterion as (3) interprets (2). The truth of E cannot *precede* the complete actualization of α , since Molinism maintains (5), whether (4) is true or not. Hence, in *whatever* sense the truth of γ is 'prior' to the complete actualization of α , the truth of E is *not* 'prior' to the complete actualization of α . E is true only *relative* to various l.p. worlds, including the one that turns out to be α . Then if we grant that

- (9) P is a transitive priority relation,
- (10) the truth of γ is P-prior to the truth of E

follows from (3) and (8). Thus we have shown that if Molinism is true, there must be a univocal sense of priority at work in results such as (3) and (8), and that irrespective of what it is, if it is transitive, the truths of middle knowledge are prior in that sense to the actions and choices they are about. Thus we can say that the truth of γ is a *hard fact* relative to the truth of E.

This overcomes both Craig's objection about the equivocal use of "explanatory priority" and his objection that Adams's requirement for incompatibilist freedom tacitly depends on a demonstration that truths of middle knowledge are 'hard facts.' One doubt remains, however. In anticipation such a reconstruction, Craig says that *if* a univocal meaning for the needed priority

⁵⁸Again, in our placeholder 'P' sense, letting the Molinist fill in the value of P.

⁵⁹This will be so as long as we have picked a C that did not depend on unfeasible actions of other people.

relation is found, "I suspect that any such notion will be so generic and weak" that it will lead to absurd conclusions unless we "deny its transitivity."⁶⁰ On my approach, however, the possibility of such a *reductio* of P's transitivity does not arise, because I have shown that Molinism implies the existence of a priority relation which can be used univocally throughout the argument, without needing to specify it. The onus is thus on the *Molinist*, not his or her critic, to show that there is some *non-transitive* relation of priority which is adequate to make truths of counterfactuals 'world-neutral' in the way necessary for them to restrict the worlds God can actualize. And of course, unless this result is preserved by the interpretation of P, Molinism will not be of any use for the purposes for which its defenders want it, such as answering the problem of evil and explaining the consistency of providence with our moral responsibility for our actions.

It is the Molinist, then, who has to come up with a sense of P strong enough to establish the synthetic modality of feasibility, and yet still weak enough to remain intransitive. And since the metaphysical priority which makes contingent truths 'world-neutral' in the sense necessary to ground *any* real synthetic modality is almost bound to remain a metaphysical primitive, the Molinist has little chance of vindicating his or her position.

Can the Molinist urge that although that P is a metaphysical primitive, *our common intuition* is that it is intransitive? This would be very unconvincing, because to most philosophers of religion, even many of those sympathetic to Molinism (let alone laypersons), it comes as a complete surprise that its defenders would *even consider* suggesting that the truth of a counterfactual of freedom in middle knowledge is a 'soft fact' in the same way as truths in the past about what I will do in the future are considered 'soft' by Ockhamist theories of divine foreknowledge. Rather, it is usually assumed that a Molinist theory of middle knowledge as the basis for divine foreknowledge is an *alternative* to an Ockhamist interpretation of divine foreknowledge.⁶¹ For the Molinist who suggests

⁶⁰Craig, p.860.

⁶¹For example, see Tom Morris's discussion of these approaches as strict alternatives in *Our Idea of God* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), ch.5, pp. 94-96. Morris's natural impression that truths of middle

(continued...)

that P is intuitively intransitive claims that (a) there are truths about what I would do 'prior' to my existence; (b) these truths are 'prior' to the divine decision to create me; *and yet* (c) these truths are *posterior* to my actual actions and choices! If *intuition* is our measure, then it must be frankly confessed that the circle which such intransitivity in 'priority' implies seems to border on insanity: when caught in such a circle, the very notion of our *existence* becomes so pliable that it is virtually reduced to meaninglessness. Clearly, the 'soft fact' Molinist's claim is about as *anti-intuitive* as a philosophical claim could possibly be.⁶² The natural view is that, if Molinism makes sense at all, the truths of its counterfactuals of freedom constitute facts that are "hard" not only at an earlier time (as in Ockhamism), but even metaphysically prior to all time.

But I think we can say something stronger. There is good reason to think that on the Molinist account, the 'metaphysical priority' attributed to the truths of counterfactuals which establish feasibility *must* be understood as transitive, even if nothing else can be said about it. The reason is that otherwise, the division of logically possible states of affairs into *feasible* and *unfeasible* will not even be 'prior' to God's creative decisions. One can see this as follows:

(1) Suppose that Molinism is true.

⁶¹(...continued)
knowledge must be understood as *hard facts* is conveyed by the following passage: "Unlike Ockhamism, it [Molinism] offers an interesting account of how God is able to know the future. And it carries no hint of an implication that, in order to be free, I must be able to act in such a way as to change or determine what God's beliefs about me have already been" (p.96).

⁶²For this reason I find Tom Flint's suggestion that "the everyday believer's view of providence is simply rough-hewn Molinism" dubious at best (Flint, "Middle Knowledge and the Doctrine of Infallibility," in *Philosophical Perspectives 5: Philosophy of Religion*, ed. James E. Tomberlin). If by this Flint means that Christians intuitively hold beliefs that can be expressed in a *soft fact* interpretation of Molinism, the claim is absolutely unconvincing. Soft fact Molinism is the sort of doctrine that holds together a position which is obviously contradictory *on its face* by splitting up concepts in such a way as to reduce all the terms in the claim to virtual meaninglessness—the kind of mystification which gave scholasticist thought such a bad name. Soft fact Molinism, when unmasked, is a thousand times more inscrutable than Duns Scotus's modest suggestion that there could be epistemologically objective "formal distinctions" between entities that are nevertheless metaphysically inseparable. This claim at least has an intelligible meaning, but the 'soft fact' Molinist's circle of *an actual act of the agent prior to his actuality* can literally be said to be without meaning.

- (2) Suppose that God makes some free decision D, such as the decision to actualize some possible world W (consistent with 1).
- (3) There is then a contingently true proposition D* which says 'God decides D.'
- (4) D* must be true only *relative* to specific l.p. worlds, i.e. D* is not true P-prior to the complete actualization of α .

Proof (By *reductio*)

- (4i) Suppose that D* is 'world-neutrally' true P-prior to the actualization of a complete l.p. world.
- (4ii) Then it would be *unfeasible* for God not to decide D (from 2, 4i and the interpretation we have given for 'unfeasibility').
- (4iii) Then W is the only feasible l.p. world (4ii & our interpretation of feasibility).
[*Explanation*: since D is the decision to actualize W, if refraining from deciding D is unfeasible, the actualization of any other l.p. world is unfeasible].
- (4iv) But in that case, the truths of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are irrelevant for divine decision-making.
- (4v) By supposition (1), (4iv) is false.

This shows us why a Molinist cannot hold that God's decision to actualize a particular l.p. world is P-prior to the complete actuality of α . If it was, then this decision would have to be neutral between a plurality of worlds, but it would reduce the sphere of the feasible to a single l.p. world. In that case, the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom would be irrelevant for every divine decision they are supposed to inform—since these decisions themselves would already be the only feasible option for God. The actuality of decision like D is therefore a part of α , but they are not actual P-prior to the actuality of α as a whole. Then we continue:

- (5) The truth of a counterfactual of creaturely freedom such as β ('Curley would take the bribe in C') is P-prior to the complete actualization of α (as established by our analysis of the meaning of feasibility).
- (6) Suppose (for *reductio*) that P not transitive
- (7) Then the truth of β is *not* P-prior to the truth of D*.
- (8) But the truth of β is P-prior to the truth of D* (according to Molinism—premise 1).
- (9) Thus P is transitive (from *reductio* of 6 by 7 & 8).

What this argument shows is that if P-priority is not a transitive relation, the truths of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom that makes up Divine middle knowledge cannot play the role Molinism requires them to play. We know that God's decision is not P-prior to the complete actuality of α (as per 4), and that the truth of counterfactuals such as β is P-prior to the complete actuality of α (5), but from these premises, we can only infer that these truths of middle knowledge are prior to the divine

decisions whose consequences that are supposed to restrict, if P is transitive [(4 & 5) \Rightarrow 8 only if P is transitive]. So the Molinist always implicitly treats the priority he implicitly grants to truths of middle knowledge *as a transitive priority relation*. The possibility of making a case for a 'soft fact' interpretation of truths of middle knowledge thus looks very bleak indeed.

(E) Why Molinism Must Attribute Truths of Middle Knowledge to Our Agency

Truths of middle knowledge, then, can only be coherently interpreted as putative hard facts. But by itself, this concession will not cause the Molinist to capitulate completely. As Craig urges at the end of his response to Adams, "even if they [c.o.fs] were in some peculiar sense explanatorily prior to our actions because they are true and known by God logically prior to categorical contingent propositions, that would not be incompatible with the freedom of our actions."⁶³ To refute this, the best strategy for the Existentialist is to show that if Molinism is true and truths of middle knowledge are hard facts, whatever remaining sense our actions are "free" is *insufficient for moral responsibility* for our choices and actions.

It is a primary concern of Molinism to maintain its consistency with the conditions of agency necessary for moral responsibility. This is why, as Adams acknowledges, Haskar suggests that "Molinists may wish to hold that in the case of a true counterfactual of freedom, it is the agent of the free action described in the consequent who brings it about that the conditional is true."⁶⁴ I have vindicated Haskar's view that the Molinist cannot coherently attribute these truths to the agent *in the sense of making them soft facts dependent on the agent's actual choices*. Nevertheless, if even if the world-neutral truths of counterfactuals of freedom admitted to

⁶³Craig, p.861.

⁶⁴Adams, "An Anti-Molinist Argument," p.345. This will have to mean 'true' in *world-neutral* sense, as we have seen, since not all c.o.fs about a person that are true *relative* to some l.p. world are also true in the privileged sense required for a truth of middle knowledge. For example, it is not part of middle knowledge that at W', Curley would refuse the bribe in C. What middle knowledge contains is the world-neutral truth about what Curley would do in C—namely, take the bribe.

be are 'hard facts,' I think the Molinist has *no option but* to hold that the agent is in some sense⁶⁵ still the author of truths of middle knowledge that refer to her possible choices and actions. The reason why, as we will see, is brought out by an 'initial' Existentialist argument that unfeasibility of refraining from my actions voids my moral responsibility for them.

The Existentialist finds the Molinist's counterfactual 'power to do otherwise' ephemeral not because Molinism says that I am committed by my *essence* to do what I will do in C, but rather because Molinism implies that the truth of the c.o.f. (or fulfilled 'subjunctive conditional,' to be accurate) which entails my actual choice is metaphysically prior to the choice itself. The truth of this c.o.f. makes it *unfeasible* for me to do otherwise than it describes. Thus if I am not somehow the author of the truth of my c.o.f. itself, the fact that it is *logically* possible for me to choose otherwise in C is irrelevant: I am no more responsible for it than if I had been *caused* to do it. The Existentialist insists that moral responsibility requires *more* than the logical possibility of doing otherwise: it also requires the *synthetic* possibility of doing otherwise, in every valid sense of synthetic modality.

Molinism allows us only 'ephemeral' power to do otherwise because feasibility is a form of synthetic modality, like nomological possibility. I am in a position relative to the truth of my counterfactuals of freedom analogous to the position I am in relative to causal laws, because the truth of both, although contingent, is metaphysically prior to my processes of deliberating, deciding, willing and acting as an *actualized person*.

William Alston has helped to make clear the force of this objection by showing that any conception of divine foreknowledge which acts like causal necessitation is incompatible with libertarian freedom of the will. In a 1985 paper, he argues that a condition Plantinga proposes in *God, Freedom, and Evil* is not sufficient for "significant" libertarian freedom in the full sense:

P: "It was within Jones's power at t_2 to do something such that if he had done it, then God

⁶⁵However, this certainly cannot be a straightforward causal sense. See Adams's "An Anti-Molinist Argument," endnote 7, p.352.

would not have held a belief that in fact he did hold." ⁶⁶

Alston points out that this power *P* only guarantees the truth of the compatibilist *causal* counterfactual that "the actual situation in which Jones found himself is such that a contrary decision, inserted into that situation, would give rise to a contrary action." ⁶⁷ In other words, this power *P* only says that no antecedent conditions and causal laws *causally* necessitate Jones's doing at t_2 what God foreknows he will do. In this sense, Jones has a "*real*" and not just logical possibility of doing otherwise. But Alston argues that Jones will not have the logical possibility of doing otherwise even with *P*:

For clearly *God believes that p at t₁ entails Jones does not do something at t₂ such that if he had done it God would not have believed that p at t₁.* And so if divine beliefs are "antecedent conditions" in the relevant sense, i.e. hard facts about the time at which a given such belief is held, then Plantinga's condition for something being within a person's power [i.e. significant freedom] is not met by Jones and power *P*. ⁶⁸

Alston acknowledges that in *God, Freedom, and Evil*, Plantinga does not draw the distinction between "hard" and "soft" facts, which becomes crucial in his later Ockhamist view of divine foreknowledge. But even if divine beliefs about an action at a time earlier than that action can be treated as 'soft facts,' the analogous beliefs based on middle knowledge cannot be, as we have seen. Thus we should be able to construct an analogous 'Alstonian' argument that works against Molinism, even if the Ockhamist can escape the original one directed at him.

The key is to realize that "real" possibility means possibility in a *synthetic* sense, but this is not limited to causal modality: *Molinist 'feasibility' is also synthetic* in the relevant sense, as we have

⁶⁶William P. Alston, "Divine Foreknowledge and Alternative Conceptions of Human Freedom," first published in the *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion*, 18 (1985): 19-32; reprinted in *God, Foreknowledge, and Freedom*, ed. John Martin Fischer (Stanford University Press, 1989): p.270. The original quotation comes from Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, p.71.

⁶⁷Alston, p.266.

⁶⁸Alston, p.271.

seen in detail. The Molinist is able to make power *P* look sufficient to guarantee "real possibility" of doing otherwise only by suppressing the fact that a 'hard' truth of middle knowledge constitutes a *different* sort of *real* (or quasi-nomic) impossibility of doing otherwise. Consider the following example.

There is a true Molinist counterfactual δ saying that if Jones were to exist in a given situation *C* at t_2 , he would do *X*; yet Jones also has power *P* at t_2 .

Suppose that at t_1 God believes that Jones does *X* in *C* at t_2 . But this is foreknowledge of a 'soft fact' that Jones has the causal power to change by making a decision at t_2 . Moreover, let us even extend power *P* to say that Jones has a real *causal* possibility of not doing *X* at t_2 : i.e. *if* he decided to do something else, no causal factors would block the fulfillment of that alternative decision. But even with *P* in this extended sense, the truth of δ denies him the real *feasibility of deciding differently in the first place*: thus his *causal* power to implement a different choice, were he to make it, is not much use to him. Compatibilist freedom secured by *P* in this case hides a synthetic limitation which functions as a "real" impossibility in a way analogous to causal necessity.

Thus the Molinist cannot reject this comparison of causal laws and patterns among true counterfactuals of freedom by saying that *in life*, we are free for our c.o.fs in a sense in which we are not for natural laws. Nor can the Molinist retort that the comparison simply misses the logically contingent nature of Molinist true c.o.fs, since we have shown that is not the issue. The Molinist only has one remaining way of asserting a disanalogy between nomological impossibility and the unfeasibility of acting contrary to the world-neutral truth of one's c.o.f. He can point out that causal laws, especially if interpreted in a strong modal fashion (as I have done), embody limitations on action which confront us as *absolutely alien* to our volition. The reason is that *our agency* has nothing to do with creating these limitations: we identify with pure physical necessities even less than with desires and impulses that enter our conscious life without our consent. By contrast, the

Molinist must say, the so-called 'restrictions' imposed by the prior truth of our counterfactuals of freedom *arise from*, or in some sense *just are*, our agency. We are *identified*⁶⁹ not only minimally (as with the conscious impulses) but *wholly*, with the truth of our c.o.fs. Far from being alien to us, our true c.o.fs are what is most *authentically* and absolutely *our own*. If truths of middle knowledge are admitted to be 'hard facts,' then asserting that our agency is sufficiently associated with these facts to allow moral responsibility for our actions is the Molinist's only way of responding to the 'initial' Existentialist critique.

(D): The Existentialist Refutation of Molinism

We have now forced the Molinist's hand. The association he posits between *our agency* and the contingent but world-neutral truth of our counterfactuals of freedom is the only way he can resist the initial objection that the priority of these truths to our actual existence restricts our freedom in a sense analogous to causal necessitation. It is only at this point that the Existentialist's main critique of Molinism can begin.

It is assumed by most analytic philosophers familiar with the issue that the worst problem for the Molinist is that he can give no account of what *makes true* the set of an individual's c.o.fs that make up middle knowledge.⁷⁰ But the limited force of this objection has only served to obscure the

⁶⁹I am using "identification" here in the sense in which it is often used by Harry Frankfurt, namely as the central problematic of personhood.

⁷⁰See, for example, David Lewis, "Evil for Freedom's Sake?," *Philosophical Papers*, Vol. XXII (1993), No.3. Lewis asks, "What does make unfulfilled counterfactuals of freedom true?" (p.161). See also Robert Adams's first critique of Molinism in his "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil," first published in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 14 (1977), pp. 109-17; reprinted in *The Problem of Evil*, ed. Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 113f [All further citations of this paper refer to the pagination in *The Problem of Evil*]. In this paper, Adams argues that the Molinist has no clear conception of how anything could make counterfactuals of creaturely freedom true.

real problem. For this standard objection fails to recognize that the Molinist does claim that we are *identified* with our true c.o.fs in the practical sense. Even the 'soft fact' interpretation of Molinism which we have critiqued is an extreme attempt to preserve this essential element in the Molinist's program. The Existentialist's objection is more damning than the standard one, because it aims at this real heart of Molinism.

The Existentialist's main argument begins with two conditions I have already alluded to, which both Molinists and Existentialists typically recognize as necessary conditions for moral responsibility for an action:

- (1) The individual must have multiple logically possible alternatives for any action.
- (2) To be an action, the description (including the purpose or end) under which the individual acted (i.e. the maxim) must be attributable to the individual's agency. In other words, she must be *identified* with that maxim, intending her action under that teleological description.⁷¹

The Molinist accepts condition (1). To accommodate (2), he must somehow explain *how it is possible* for us be identified with the true c.o.fs which determine the maxims we would adopt in each possible circumstance. The difficulty arises, however, from a third premise required by Molinism but rejected by Existentialism:

- (3) Truths about what a person would do in different circumstances are made true, in some manner, metaphysically prior to the person's actual existence.

From (1), (2), and (3) taken together, there arises an antinomy which I will call the *Antinomy of Authenticity*. The general problem this antinomy poses for any sort of Molinism can best be understood in terms of a *trilemma*.

The first horn of the trilemma is *Suárezian Molinism*, which maintains that the truth of a

⁷¹It was Anscombe who first analyzed agency along these lines, but this standard for agency is also found in Donagan's *The Theory of Morality* and in many other discussions of action theory.

person's counterfactuals of freedom is a primitive and inexplicable 'fact.'⁷² This is obviously the position against which the 'standard' analytic objection to Molinism is directed. This Suárezian position saves conditions (1) and (3) through the contingent but world-neutral ontological status of the truth of c.o.fs. But it is unable to satisfy condition (2). Saying that the truth-maker of the individual's counterfactuals of freedom is unanalyzable divorces the truth of his c.o.fs from an individual's agency: in that case, the individual *cannot be authentically identified with his true c.o.fs.*

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The second horn of the trilemma is what I will call *sophisticated Molinism*, which I think represents the *best* alternative the Molinist has.⁷⁴ The sophisticated Molinist answers the objection to the Suárezian position as follows: on pain of destroying an individual's moral responsibility for all his actions, she says that the individual's own *agency* is somehow the truth-maker of his c.o.fs. Now she appears to have a real explanation for why the individual is *identified* with the truth of his counterfactuals of freedom, and hence why all his actions in accordance with these c.o.fs are morally imputable to him. The sophisticated Molinist thus appears to satisfy both conditions (1) and (2). But her way of preserving (2) contradicts condition (3), to which any Molinist is committed. 'Soft fact' Molinism is precisely an attempt to deny this conflict, but as we have seen, the 'soft fact' interpretation of the truths of counterfactuals of freedom fails when their world-neutrality is recognized. The contradiction between (2) and (3) is then inevitable: for *in what conceivable sense*

⁷²See Robert Adams, "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil," p.115.

⁷³Adams is therefore wrong to say that Suarez's position is "the least clearly unsatisfactory type of explanation for the alleged possibility of middle knowledge" (Adams, p.115). Although Suarez can simply bite the bullet in the face of the standard analytic objection, his position reduces human responsibility for our actions to an absurdity.

⁷⁴This is a view I do not find represented in the literature. Obviously, it is not introduced here as a straw man version of Molinism, for my purpose is to show that every possible version of Molinism, including this one, is untenable because of the trilemma. If you don't agree with me that sophisticated Molinism is the Molinist's best option, choose some other way of trying to accommodate (1), (2), and (3): all will fail.

could person's agency, purely *as possible* and metaphysically prior to its actual existence, be the authentic the source of anything? We might accurately characterize Existentialism by saying that its *fundamental intuition* is that a logically possible person, prior to their existence, is not the source of anything that identifies them with any element of volitional character. To deny this by denying the transitivity of the relevant sense of 'priority' is to obscure the very meaning of *existence*—as well as to strip truths of middle knowledge of their power to restrict the results of divine choices (as we saw).

Thus the problem with 'hard fact' Molinism (the only coherent kind) is not that it leaves the individual with no *logical* possibility of doing otherwise. Rather, the problem is that it destroys the agent's moral responsibility for her actions by imposing on her a synthetic necessity to act and choose in a certain way, when this synthetic necessity itself cannot be attributed to her agency. The requirement of authentic identification which is necessary for moral responsibility cannot be satisfied by satisfying conditions (3) and (1) at the expense of (2), as 'hard fact' Molinism does.

Finally, the trilemma allows for one other conceivable resolution, which we might call *Essentialism*. The Essentialist says that it is simply part of an individual's *essence* that his agency would choose certain actions, or would will its acts for the sake of certain ends, rather than others. Essentialism thus conceived satisfies (3) and (2), but only at the price of violating condition (1) by giving the individual an agency not logically free to do otherwise in action and motivation. On this account, the individual's true counterfactuals of freedom are logically *essential* to them. Such an Essentialist position escapes the 'antinomy of authenticity' only *if* we accept that condition (1) is *not necessary* for authentic identification with (and thus moral responsibility for) our actions.⁷⁵

⁷⁵Notice that Harry Frankfurt's understanding of human freedom comes close to 'Essentialism' of this kind. Frankfurt tries to escape the 'antinomy of authenticity' by arguing that the logical possibility of *acting* otherwise is not a necessary condition for authentic identification (condition 2). This position also fails, I believe, because, whatever we say about actions, alternative logical possibilities for higher order *willing* and *caring* themselves are required if these are to be the ground of our identification with actions. Kant's Incorporation Thesis will still apply
(continued...)

But as we have seen, this is not what the Molinist claims. For the Molinist, the individual's c.o.fs are *free* in the sense of being *logically contingent* for him, thus satisfying (1). Moreover, this is seen as a necessary condition for moral responsibility. But (3) entails that there can be no intelligible sense in which his *agency* can possibly have *identified* him with these contingencies—and this violates condition (2). The notion of a possible but non-actual agency which nevertheless contingently *makes* some set of choices attributable to itself *in se*, is nonsense—like the round square cupola.

Thus agency, as explicitly conceived by *sophisticated Molinism*—and implicitly conceived in all Molinism—makes no sense at all. If this conclusion surprises you as extreme, remember that the Molinist does not merely claim that some set of c.o.fs is *possibly* adopted by the individual's agency, i.e. *would* be attributable to him *if* a given logically possible world were actual. That view might make sense. But no—we are told that, out of all the sets of c.o.fs an individual has in different l.p. worlds, one set is supposed to be *actually* (but contingently) attributable to him, *prior to his existence* and in fact prior to the complete actualization of α , thus restricting the set of l.p. worlds in which it is feasible for him to be actualized. Indeed, because of these counterfactual truths, which moral responsibility for our actions requires us to attribute to the possible person's agency, God may even chose not to actualize the possible person to whom they are attributed. The Existentialist refutes Molinism by pointing out that this stronger, world-neutral truth of one's c.o.fs which Molinism requires, cannot be attributable to the agent. The essence of any agency is to *act*, and that is something it cannot *actually do* prior to being *actual* itself. This is the fixed point on which the Existentialist stands.

The problem here is highlighted by David Lewis's remarks in his recent effort to evaluate the

⁷⁵(...continued)
to *higher-order maxims*, whatever we say about action-maxims. But critiquing Frankfurt's position is not my business in this paper.

results of basing a free will defense on Molinism. Lewis argues that the Molinist can only mean that the truths of unfulfilled counterfactuals of freedom are modal *primitives*, because they can supervene neither on the will of God nor on personal agency. Lewis first asserts that *fulfilled* counterfactuals of freedom, such as the truth of the fact that Judas would betray Christ, must be made true by the agent's free action. He continues:

Unfulfilled counterfactuals of freedom are very different. They're not rendered true by the free choice of the agent, since they concern choices that never actually take place. Some of them even concern agents who never actually exist.⁷⁶

But this actually involves a double misrepresentation. First, the Molinist really treats fulfilled and unfulfilled counterfactuals of freedom in the same way: both are true *prior* to any choices the fully actualized agent makes in time.⁷⁷ Second, as I have argued *contra Suárez*, the Molinist must also maintain that in *another sense*, all of the individual's counterfactuals of freedom, fulfilled and unfulfilled, *are* "rendered true" by the individual's "free agency." Otherwise, the actions arising from the truth of these c.o.fs in actualized circumstances would not be morally imputable to the agent.

Lewis simply *assumes* that the Molinist cannot mean that a person's free agency is the truth-maker for their counterfactuals of freedom, because he sees so clearly why such a claim would make no sense. But Lewis fails to see the 'antinomy of authenticity' in which the Molinist is caught: unfortunately, the Molinist must (to preserve moral responsibility) make precisely the incoherent claim about individual free agencies which Lewis is too generous to attribute to him.

Nevertheless, it is hard to see immediately that there is no rational way the Molinist can claim

⁷⁶David Lewis, "Evil for Freedom's Sake?", pp.160-161.

⁷⁷This point is clarified by a distinction Robert Adams makes between truths of middle knowledge as "deliberative conditionals" versus "counterfactuals:" as he says, a deliberative conditional "ought not, in strictness, to be called counterfactual. For in asserting one of them, one does not commit oneself to the falsity of the antecedent" (Adams, "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil, p.118). The conditionals involved in Molinism are *neutral as to the actuality of their antecedent*.

that my agency is identified in the necessary sense with my actions. For surely my true counterfactuals of freedom describe what *I* would do, what choices *my agency itself* would generate. Doesn't this fact—that the counterfactual is *about* my agency—establish a sufficient connection for identification? Accordingly, the sophisticated Molinist might try to respond to the Antinomy of Authenticity as follows: "A true counterfactual of Curley's freedom tells us what Curley *would do* in situation S. But in relating this to Curley's agency, what I mean is that Curley's agency *would* bring about the action predicted by the true counterfactual in S. The fact that this truth holds metaphysically prior to Curley's being actualized in S is no object to its being attributable to his agency, because it describes *what his agency would bring about*." ⁷⁸

This is no doubt what the sophisticated Molinist must think. But this response misses the point of the Existentialist's objection. The Existentialist's point is that *what a person's agency would do* must itself be attributable to his agency, if the person is to be morally responsible for what he would do. If we accept the Molinist hypothesis that there is such a truth for *every possible* circumstance Curley could be in, including the ones he *actually* passes through in the real world, then his actions in every actual circumstance reflect the truths about what his agency *would do* in those circumstances. If his agency is not responsible for these truths about *what it would do*, then Curley is not responsible for his actions. But there is no way his agency can be responsible for the truth of these fulfilled counterfactuals about his agency, or any other counterfactuals true for it.

A subjunctive relation of the agency to its actions *within* the counterfactual is thus not good enough for moral responsibility. The reason why is not hard to see in light of our previous analysis of truths of feasibility as synthetic necessities for the person analogous to causal necessities. The Existentialist's argument against Molinism can be summarized as follows:

⁷⁸I am indebted to Alvin Plantinga for this counterargument. However, I have rephrased it in my own words, and I am solely responsible for any infelicities it might involve.

- i. To be morally responsible for an action X, an agent A must be volitionally *identified* with that action [principle (2) above].
- ii. An agent A is *alien to* (non-identified with) any synthetic necessity which he has not brought about by his own agency [this is clear in the case of *causal necessity*].
- iii. A true synthetic counterfactual C of A's freedom telling us that he would do X in situation S is a synthetic necessity for A in the following sense: its *actuality* precedes the actualization of any particular complete logically possible world, and hence it holds for A in every *feasible* world [implied by Molinism].
- iv. An agent A is alien to (non-identified with) any state of affairs X that is *logically or synthetically* necessitated by the actuality of another state of affairs Y with which he is not identified [corollary to principle (2)].

In support of (iv), the Principle of Transitivity of Alienation, I should point out that this principle cannot be in dispute between the Existentialist and Molinist. For it is the reason why non-compatibilists accept that an agent cannot be morally responsible for an action which is causally necessitated by some prior state of affairs, *if he did not freely bring about* that causally prior state of affairs. The key is to see that the transitivity of non-identification (or alienation) holds *in general* for any relevant form of synthetic necessitation, and not just for causal necessitation. If X synthetically necessitates Y, and individual I is not identified with X, then individual I is not identified with Y.

We continue:

- v. The *truth* of counterfactual C is a state of affairs which logically necessitates A's doing X in S [from the definition of C as given in (iii): $\Box(\text{If } C \rightarrow \text{A does X in S})$].
- vi. If A is not identified with the truth of counterfactual C, then A is not identified with doing X in S [by application of (iv) to (v)].
- vii. If A is not identified with the truth of counterfactual C, then A is not morally responsible for doing X in S [by application of (i) to the consequent of (vi)].
- viii. If A did not bring about the truth of counterfactual C, then A is not identified with the truth of counterfactual C [instantiation of (ii) by (iii)].
- ix. If A did not bring about the truth of counterfactual C, then A is not morally responsible for doing X in S [(vii) & (viii): modus ponens].
- x. But A could not have brought about the truth of counterfactual C: its truth

metaphysically precedes his existence, and is a 'hard fact' relative to his actions and choices.

This premise (x) summarizes the result of our previous critique of 'soft fact' Molinism.

- xi. Hence A is not morally responsible for doing X in S [(ix), (x): modus ponens]
- xii. Yet the Molinist insists that A satisfies the conditions for being morally responsible for doing X in S [granted by the Molinist].
- xiii. Molinism leads to a contradiction [(xi) & (xii)].

So the fact that A's agency *would* bring about X in S is not enough for moral responsibility. Unless A also brought about the fact that *his agency would bring about X in S*, A is not morally responsible for doing X when S is actualized. Thus there is no escape from the Antinomy of Authenticity for the sophisticated Molinist. This antinomy provides a *reductio* of the Molinist claim to preserve the moral responsibility of agents for actions and choices undertaken with alternative logical possibilities.

The fundamental problem with Molinism, then, is not with the notion of counterfactuals of freedom *per se*, nor with the kind of 'world-neutral' ontological status they exhibit *in general* (for any real synthetic modality will depend on truths with such a status), but rather with the notion of agency to which Molinism is committed. If the Molinist were only committed to the notion of a non-actual agent's *possible actions*, there would be nothing wrong, for we could interpret him as meaning, for example, that if Agent A were actual in W' (if W' were the actual world), Agent A would refuse the \$20,000 bribe. But because the Molinist holds that true counterfactuals of freedom are a segment of *actuality neutral with respect to the actuality of a complete logically possible world*⁷⁹, and yet must attribute these truths to persons' agencies, he is implicitly tracing these 'world-neutral' facts to the *actions of non-actual* agents. Such a conception is not just an *inadequate* basis for an agent's moral

⁷⁹This, of course, is the rigorous meaning of the term "world-independent," which I used earlier in the analysis to explain the middle ontological status of the truth of c.o.fs.

responsibility for his actions; when exposed for what it really is, this conception of agency is directly self-refuting. Despite this, we can produce for Molinism what J.L. Mackie calls a *theory of error*. It is not hard to understand how intelligent thinkers such as de Molina and Suárez could have been led to a position that commits them to such an untenable conception of agency. For they were working in a theological context shaped by Augustine, Boethius, Anselm and Aquinas, all of whom conceived God as eternal in the sense of being absolutely outside any temporal succession, fixed in an absolutely changeless eternal present.⁸⁰ Tom Morris explains the natural result of this conception of divine atemporal eternity. In order to conceive of God as an agent rather than a impersonal Platonic principle, atemporalists had to explain

..how an atemporal God could act at different times, in different ways, while never himself changing. The story is simple: There is one eternal divine act outside of time that has a great number of different effects in time, at different times.⁸¹

This picture of the divine agency leads to Molinism in two ways. First, in order for God so conceived to know in atemporal eternity all that is necessary for the multiple effects of his single divine act to include *responses* to creaturely initiatives and choice, one has to "defend something like the Molinist conception of divine knowledge.." ⁸² But in addition, this divine agency which atemporally and all at once performs in a single act everything it will ever do from our perspective intuitively inspires the sense that there might be an analogous notion of human agency. Against this background, the notion that the truth of a person's counterfactuals of freedom must somehow be attributable to their agency, as if they had made them true *in act* prior to temporal existence, must not have seemed strange.

In this, the early Molinists were *not only* led astray by a wholly inadequate conception of

⁸⁰Tom Morris, *Our Idea of God* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), p.120

⁸¹Morris, p.131.

⁸²Morris, p.132.

divine agency.⁸³ In addition, they failed to see that even if such a conception of agency could work for God, it could not properly be extended to other persons. For on this account, God is at least *actual* in all logically possible worlds, and His 'single ultimate act' could therefore be thought of as *world-neutrally actual*⁸⁴, whereas the 'single act' of an individual human person, by analogy, would implicitly attributed to his agency prior to its very actuality. This implicit but unrecognized equivocation between divine and human agency was the root of the fatal flaw in Molinism. It remains to be seen, however, whether an existentialist approach can provide a better account of our intuitions about the volitional possibilities open to moral agents exercising their free will in time. This investigation is a task for another paper.

⁸³For in fact, a even a single "act" outside of time would not be an action if there is not a "time" or ordered series for God in which the state of having acted is metaphysically prior to the "action." Action intrinsically involves a time-like ordering in actuality, and hence the notion of an eternally present and unchanging state without antecedent, which is nevertheless called an "action," is once again incoherent.

⁸⁴In fact, God in the Augustinian-Anselmian view has a kind of *noumenal actuality* with *no possible change of character*. This is very similar to the conception of agency used to ground feasibility on the 'Kantian approach:' see §IV (C).