

## **YET ANOTHER ANTI-MOLINIST ARGUMENT\***

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### **I. Motivating Molinism**

#### *Introduction*

“Molinism”, in contemporary usage, is the name for a theory about the workings of divine providence. Its defenders include some of the most prominent contemporary Protestant and Catholic philosophical theologians.<sup>1</sup> Molinism is often said to be the only way to steer a middle course between two extremes: the radically opposed conceptions of foreknowledge, providence, and grace associated with Open Theism and Calvinism.

Robert Adams, William Hasker, and others have formulated powerful arguments against Molinism.<sup>2</sup> I believe their work has uncovered a deep problem with Molinism: it posits “brute” or “ungrounded” facts concerning matters that require “grounding” in more fundamental facts. The argument I develop against Molinism is in some respects less illuminating than theirs; it does not throw Molinism’s deepest problems into relief. In

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\*I have benefited from the comments and criticisms of an embarrassingly large number of philosophers — at the 2004 Wheaton Philosophy Conference, where the argument was first presented; at the Yale conference honoring Robert Adams; in a philosophy of religion seminar at Rutgers University; and at a meeting of the Joseph Butler Society in Oriel College, Oxford. I was encouraged to discover that Robin Collins had come up with a similar argument, quite independently. I owe especial debts to Josh Armstrong, William Lane Craig, Keith DeRose, Tom Flint, Daniel Fogal, John Hawthorne, David Hunt, Sam Newlands, Calvin Normore, Alex Pruss, Mike Rea, and Jason Turner; but I know I am forgetting someone, and that I have not even done justice to all of the objections I *do* remember.

another way, however, it is slightly more ambitious. Molinist feathers are often unruffled by complaints about “ungrounded” facts and the apparent “explanatory circularities” to which they lead. Groundedness and bruteness are metaphysically loaded notions; they — and the principles alleged, by anti-Molinists, to govern them — are complex and contested; Molinists have found ways to cast doubt upon their deployment in the arguments of Adams and company.<sup>3</sup> I try to show that Molinism has highly unintuitive consequences that are independent of grounding worries.

I begin with a rough sketch of Open Theism and Calvinism, highlighting the problematic aspects of each view, and the way in which Molinism is supposed to avoid them, serving as a mean between two theological extremes. The background is intended merely to explain why Molinism is important, and why so many contemporary philosophers and theologians have little alternative but to accept the doctrine. Readers familiar with Molinism and already convinced of its importance may wish to skip ahead to section II.

### *Alternatives to Molinism: Open Theism and Calvinism*

Open Theists are libertarians; they think that we would not be free if our decisions were the inevitable outcome of the distant past or God’s irresistible, prior decrees.<sup>4</sup> What exactly is meant by “free” in this context is a nice question; but the libertarians who are involved in this debate generally assume there is an important variety of freedom that is incompatible with determinism, necessary for moral responsibility, and usually implicated in serious assertions that some event was “up to me” or “within my power”. Many Christians have suspected that a good deal of the evil God permits in our world

(perhaps, indirectly, all of it) is due to the fact that there is some great value in creating genuinely free and responsible creatures — persons whose choices God cannot simply determine, without abrogating their freedom and making them no longer responsible for their actions. This much of the Open Theist agenda enjoys wide support. More radically, however, Open Theists think freedom requires that the future be “genuinely open” — that there be no fact of the matter, ahead of time, about what I will freely choose. But, in that case, there is no fact for God to know, ahead of time.<sup>5</sup> The amount of providential control God exercises over creation is limited by the extent to which he<sup>6</sup> leaves the future open to the influence of our free decisions (and whatever other genuinely “chancy” processes he might allow<sup>7</sup>).

The amount of “openness” Open Theists need is a matter of some controversy among them. Of course God knows precisely which alternatives he has left genuinely open (perhaps some that seem to us to be live options are really not); and God knows the range of responses he could make in the future, as the story of his relationship with humanity unfolds. Furthermore, there is plenty of Biblical and theological precedent for supposing that God sometimes *makes us do things* in ways that admittedly render us mere vehicles for God’s actions, and therefore not personally responsible for what we do. So it is not as though the God of the Open Theists can never infallibly predict what someone will choose to do — just not what they will choose on those occasions when they are allowed to exercise genuine freedom. It need be no part of this picture of divine providence that God is ever *surprised* by the outcomes of the decisions he leaves up to us. But it does involve his taking *risks*: God may know “the end from the beginning”, because he can see that all the genuinely open alternatives can be made to converge, in

one way or another, upon an outcome that God chooses. Still, according to Open Theists, between creation and eschaton, God allows many situations to develop without his having prior knowledge of exactly how they will turn out.

The Open Theists' picture of foreknowledge and providence includes two theses that conflict with Catholic teaching and most Protestant theological traditions. Open Theism may save the letter of the traditional doctrine of God's omniscience — God can know all truths, and yet not know what will happen, so long as there is now no fact of the matter about what will happen. Still, most Christians have affirmed something the Open Theist denies: that God has knowledge, at all times (or perhaps from a timeless perspective), of everything that will ever occur. Secondly, Open Theists embrace a “risky” conception of the way God guides the course of history: God makes the decision to allow a certain course of events to unfold *before* he knows exactly what the outcome will be.

Far to the other side of the spectrum from the Open Theists and their view of providence, there are Christians like John Calvin who think that I can be morally responsible for a voluntary decision, despite the fact that God caused me to make that choice. If determinism is true, God set up a chain of cause-and-effect starting as far back as the Big Bang, including a series of events that led inevitably to this decision. Or, even if he left the decision-making process “indeterministic”, from the point of view of natural laws; nevertheless, he may have determined its outcome, in advance, by divine decree. Of course, if all choices are caused in one of these ways, there would be no reason to doubt that, from all eternity, God knew exactly what would happen in the course of human history, so long as he knew what he, himself, would choose to do; nor would there

be any mystery about how God could insure that history take the course he desires. I shall call this kind of divine determinism about providence “Calvinism” — though Calvin had distinctive things to say about many other matters, and I am glossing over subtle differences amongst Calvinists concerning the degree to which our choices are thought to be predetermined.

Calvinistic theology seems to be growing in popularity, at least among conservative Protestant intellectuals in North America.<sup>8</sup> But it is not for everyone. It will not appeal to Christians who hope to hew closely to orthodoxy within churches and theological traditions that come down on the side of Arminius rather than Calvin. And increased enthusiasm for Calvinism is not detectable within philosophy. It appears to me that most Christian philosophers — including many who, like Nicholas Wolterstorff and Alvin Plantinga, identify closely with Calvinist theological traditions — reject Calvin’s teachings on grace and predestination.

Why does Calvinism have much less appeal for Christian philosophers than theologians? No doubt there are many factors at work. One that seems salient is the fact that most Christian philosophers receive their training and do their teaching surrounded by people who think the problem of evil decisively disproves the content of their faith; and we are routinely required to explain how we can maintain belief “in the teeth of the evidence”. However much they may *worry* about the problem of evil, the mentors, peers, and students of theologians and church leaders do not take the problem of evil to be a knock-down argument for atheism.

If this difference in our cultural milieus does partly explain Calvinism’s unpopularity among philosophers and popularity among the Christian intellectual

leadership outside philosophy, this need not be taken to show that philosophers are somehow better placed to know the truth. Perhaps philosophers with a Calvinist heritage have simply been driven into apostasy by the greater pressure to explain themselves; perhaps those of us who come from traditionally Arminian churches would, like many of our theologian counterparts, “see the light” of Calvinism, were we not overly sensitive to the ambient skepticism.<sup>9</sup> In any case, whether they are true or false, libertarian theories of freedom provide a means for us philosophers to explain the point of a great deal of evil in a way that at least makes sense to our largely skeptical colleagues and students. Even philosophers who reject libertarianism can see the internal logic of the explanation. In my environment, the God of Calvinism does not strike many people as one who loves all his creatures and is truly worthy of worship — and, for good or ill, I share their reaction.

Many of us, then, need a middle way between these extremes: A theory of providence that allows for libertarianism about free will (and libertarianism of a sort that helps to explain the existence of moral evil); but a theory that also affirms complete foreknowledge and rejects the Open Theists’ “risky” view of providence. Molinism’s contemporary defenders present their view as an essential part of a doctrine of divine providence that can meet these desiderata; and they often allege, quite plausibly, that it is the only theory that can do the trick.<sup>10</sup>

## **II. The Molinist’s Theory of Foreknowledge**

*Foreknowledge and “Deep Explanations” for Actions*

There are very general arguments for the incompatibility of our freedom with divine foreknowledge (or even with complete knowledge, from a timeless perspective, of what is future relative to us).<sup>11</sup> But let us assume that they fail — that, so long as God leaves our choosing undetermined, and gives us whatever else a libertarian might think we need in order to have the freedom to choose from among a range of alternatives, then God’s merely knowing about it ahead of time is no threat to freedom. (I find the arguments *against* this assumption rather impressive; but they will drive libertarians directly into the arms of the Open Theists; and, here, I am exploring the viability of “middle ways”.)

For the purpose of comparing Molinism and its rivals, I shall generally assume that God can properly be said to exist, act, and know things contemporaneously with events in our universe (although I shall make occasional remarks about the case of an omniscient but timelessly eternal deity). I shall also assume that God existed prior to his creation of anything at all. The puzzles for God’s freely choosing to create a world, while knowing everything about the history of that world, would arise even had God always co-existed with created things. But I will ignore the complexities this possibility would introduce.

Could God have chosen to create a universe of a certain type, for good reasons, while utilizing every bit of his foreknowledge (or timeless knowledge) in making this choice? Numerous puzzles have been raised for the combination of foreknowledge (or timeless omniscience) with rational choice. There is something strange about the idea of a person’s choosing to make something happen when he already knows that it is going to

happen; or the idea of his deliberating over something when he knows he is going to do it.

The difficulty of imagining *ourselves* in such situations should probably not be taken to indicate anything deeply problematic about combining divine foreknowledge with rational, free, divine choices. Even remaining on a crudely anthropomorphic level, we can make some sense of the combination. A God with foreknowledge is rather like a time traveler who circles back and meets herself; both have special knowledge about what they will do before they do it. The time traveler's younger self saw her time traveling older self doing certain things; and now, after growing older and going back in time, she remembers seeing herself do what she is about to do. One can tell stories in which it seems the time traveler could choose to do things for reasons that include her memory that she will do these things. For example, she might worry that, were she to choose to do something other than what she remembers, she would make it the case that contradictions are true, and then terrible things would happen. (Like the characters in the movie *Dogma*, she might worry that everything would cease to exist if she makes a contradiction true.) Could a person rationally believe such a thing? (With that question, the characters in *Dogma* are of little help.) If so, she would be rational in choosing to do what she remembers doing precisely because she remembers doing it — so a rational choice *could* be made on the basis of a reason that crucially includes knowledge of what choice will be made. Our time traveler might not need to believe anything quite so bizarre in order to choose on such a basis. Suppose she is simply a very passive person, someone who never wants to rock the boat; the fact that she knows that she did

something at such-and-such time and place could be seen by her as a good reason to do it; perhaps in some cases the only reason.

Would the time traveler's knowledge be an obstacle to *deliberation* about the foreknown act or choice? The time traveler can certainly rehearse various reasons for and against doing something, including the fact that she remembers doing it. Would such inner rehearsal count as deliberation? Perhaps it would. Suppose she says: "I considered whether or not to jump into the river to rescue the drowning man; and although I knew that I would do it (I distinctly remember, as a young girl, seeing my time-traveling older self diving into the river), and although I could have done it merely to 'go along with the flow of history', in fact I did it out of compassion for the victim; one often has several beliefs that could serve as good reasons to do something, but not all of them need be the actual reason for which one acts." I am not at all sure that I see anything deeply wrong with that little monologue; and it sounds rather like deliberation while having full foreknowledge of the decision to be made.

I do not, then, see an easy way to prove the impossibility of someone's having complete foreknowledge, including knowledge of her own decisions, while nevertheless acting for reasons — reasons that may or may not include the foreknowledge she possesses about the act itself. Still, there is something funny about all these cases. The time traveler who does what she does because she knows that is what she will do lacks a really satisfying explanation for her action. Worries that contradictions would be true, or the desire to "go with the flow", may make the choice psychologically understandable. But ask her why the world contains that action rather than some other and she will draw a blank. Unless there is some sufficient causal explanation for the entire "loop" including

the action, her memory of it, and the decision to act, there is no further explanation to be given. Although it is hard to say anything uncontentious about the nature of explanation, the following principles sound pretty good to me: There can be a plausible *psychological explanation* of why a person chose to do such-and-such, even if the explanation appeals to the person's having reasons that include knowledge that he had only because he *would choose* such-and-such; but, in these circumstances, there will be no truly *deep explanation* why the world contains both the knowledge and the choice, unless there is some independent explanation for both.

One need not accept the Principle of Sufficient Reason to think that there is something wrong with supposing that God takes major decisions without “deep explanations”. Perhaps it is impious to think that God's reason for creating a red planet rather than a blue one was simply that he took a fancy to red planets; but far worse to say that he created a red planet rather than a blue one merely because he knew that is what he would do — for then he acts in ways not even he can explain. With respect to the important details of the creative act (or acts) by which God brought the universe into existence and holds it together, we should expect there to be deep explanations — explanations that do not, therefore, advert to foreknowledge of those very details.

#### *“Stages” in God's Foreknowledge*

The need for deep explanations of (at least some aspects of) God's creative choice leads the believer in complete foreknowledge (or timeless omniscience) to posit an ordering of the knowledge God has into various “stages” or “levels”. Some facts can serve among the reasons for God's making a world containing such-and-such, while others cannot.

Relative to the decision to include such-and-such in the world, the facts that *can* play a role in explaining the decision come “earlier than” those that *can’t* — though not, of course, in any temporal sense. Christians have typically believed that God did not *have to* create; in which case, unless he lacks a deep explanation why he created anything, there must be a subset of the things that God knows that informed this decision; and it must not include his knowledge that there will be anything at all, other than himself.

It is hard to understand how a being with complete foreknowledge could “bracket” some of it, acting only on the basis of part of what he knows — hard, but not hopelessly so. One simple-minded analogy appeals to what happens to *us* when things that we know slip our minds. If what is in fact knowledge that I will do *A* can be forgotten or ignored or bracketed somehow, then it becomes possible once again for me to choose between doing *A* and not doing *A* for reasons that are independent of my knowledge that I will do *A*. Imagine that I have been a “passive” time traveler for many years, doing what I do simply because I remember doing it. Suddenly, I become tired of my passivity. I seek, instead, to “live in the moment”, ignoring what I know about my future while I am making decisions. If I succeed, my subsequent actions will be taken for reasons I have that are independent of my foreknowledge. Believers in complete foreknowledge (or complete timeless knowledge) must suppose that, in a roughly (no doubt *very* roughly) analogous way, God can ignore or somehow “bracket” parts of what he knows, rendering them irrelevant to his decision to include this or that in his overall plan for the world. God’s beliefs about what he will do, although they do not temporally succeed his choices about what to do, nevertheless “come later in the order of explanation”. That God would freely choose to create Adam and Eve has always been

known by God, but he has always known it because he has always “already” chosen to create them; the choosing precedes, “logically”, the knowing. Anything that God knows, if it could serve among his reasons for so choosing, must come at a stage in God’s knowledge that is prior to the knowledge that he would so choose.

Calvinists should readily agree that there are stages in God’s knowledge. They merely need two such stages: (i) God’s knowledge prior to his choice of a complete world, which consisted of his knowledge purged of the truths that depend upon his choice of a world — so, presumably, little more than necessary truths. And (ii) God’s knowledge of everything whatsoever. The second stage follows hard upon God’s choice of a complete history for the world, including every “free” choice ever made by anyone. But libertarians who believe in complete foreknowledge have to say something much more complicated than Calvinists about the stages in God’s knowledge.

I will use the label “simple foreknowledge” for the following combination of views: God has complete foreknowledge, libertarianism is true, and Molinism is false.<sup>12</sup> Those who hold this combination of views must posit many stages in God’s complete foreknowledge. (Libertarians who reject Molinism and accept divine timelessness will end up with a similar view: God’s timeless knowledge must be divided into many stages.) Could God’s decision to put a creature in certain circumstances be informed by his foreknowledge that the creature will in fact be in those circumstances and will choose one alternative rather than the other? It would seem not; for, if God’s explanation for the decision included this fact, he would be unable to explain why the whole explanatory “loop” exists: the creature’s being in those circumstances, God’s knowing that this would be the case, and his putting the creature in those circumstances based upon this

knowledge. And so, according to the simple foreknowledge picture of the workings of providence, knowledge of what a creature will in fact freely do is not available at the stage prior to God's decision to create it and allow it to face this choice.<sup>13</sup> What distinguishes the Molinist from the believer in simple foreknowledge is the Molinist's willingness to say that there are truths of the form "If creature  $x$  were in conditions  $C$ ,  $x$  would freely do  $A$ " — conditionals that are not merely true because  $x$  will in fact be in  $C$  and will in fact freely do  $A$ . Rejecting Molinism requires that, if there are any true conditionals of that form, they are true because  $x$  will be in  $C$  and will then do  $A$ . True conditionals of the latter sort will generate explanatory "loops", if they appear as crucial parts of God's reason to create  $x$  in  $C$  — and this would leave God without a deep explanation for his choice. Assuming that God has deep explanations for creating each free creature and putting it in circumstances in which it exercises its freedom, and that the existence of later creatures and their circumstances often depend upon the outcomes of earlier free choices, the believer in simple foreknowledge must posit numerous stages in God's knowledge.

I pointed out two aspects of Open Theism that would strike many Christians as especially troubling: its denial of complete foreknowledge, and its "risky" view of providence. The simple foreknowledge account just sketched (and its obvious analogue in the timeless case) can be faulted on the latter score. If stages prior to God's decision to create Adam and Eve are "purged" of information that depends upon that decision, including facts about what they will do when tempted, then God takes a risk in creating them — he risks their succumbing to temptation, when (we may suppose) he hopes that they will not. And this is where the Molinist comes in, providing an alternative to both

Open Theism and the simple foreknowledge picture of providence. Molinism posits a kind of information that satisfies two requirements: (i) it is available to God at stages prior to his deciding to create free agents, and (ii) it enables him to avoid *all* risks. Somehow, says the Molinist, God must know something about Adam and Eve that does not depend upon their existing and being tempted, but that nevertheless allows him to infer that, were they to be created and tempted in a certain way, then they would sin (or refrain from sin, as the case may be). The Molinist's solution is a simple one. There just *are* conditional facts of this sort, known by God, and true independently of the existence of Adam and Eve: If the pair were created and faced with such-and-such decisions, then they would freely choose to do so-and-so. With enough conditional facts of this sort available prior to any creative decisions, God need take no risks. The Molinist can claim other advantages, as well. When defenders of simple foreknowledge are asked to explain *how* God knows what will happen ahead of time, they are usually forced to say that it is just part of his nature to know everything. The Molinist, however, has a mechanism: God simply uses modus ponens. He considers the conditionals describing what creatures would freely do in various circumstances, decides what antecedents to make true, and infers consequents that add up to a complete description of all of history.

The Molinists' "conditionals of freedom" ("CFs") allow them to agree with the Calvinists about the number of stages in God's complete foreknowledge (or, for Molinists who locate God outside time, stages in God's timeless knowledge): There are but two. The first stage consists of every fact that is independent of God's creative choices. These facts fall into two classes: (a) necessary truths and (b) CFs.<sup>14</sup> The information in (b) is exceedingly rich, according to the Molinists, allowing God to know

exactly what choices would be made by every group of free creatures he could create, in every type of situation in which he could place them. (I shall go along with the common assumption that the same stock of possible individuals is available in every world. I favor a different view, but it would make no difference, ultimately, to the case against Molinism.<sup>15</sup>) Molina believed that CFs of *divine* freedom — i.e., conditionals specifying what God would freely do, given this or that set of CFs about possible creatures — are not known prior to God's decision to create, but are rather *chosen* by God as part of his one creative act. And most Molinists follow him in this.<sup>16</sup> With full knowledge of the true creaturely CFs, God simultaneously decides what he *would* do under the hypothesis that other CFs have been true, and also what he *will* do given this actual batch of CFs. God thereby decides what the world will be like in its entirety, start to finish, despite the presence of pockets of libertarian freedom. The Molinist need posit no more stages in God's foreknowledge (or timeless knowledge) than the Calvinist. There are necessary truths and CFs, constituting the first stage, prior to any creative decisions; then, after one gigantic creative choice on God's part — a choice that is enough, given the true CFs, to settle the whole history of the world, start to finish — there is God's complete foreknowledge.

As a good libertarian, the Molinist must say that the CFs are contingent. Were they not, then what I do in any given circumstances would be settled, ahead of time, as a matter of iron-clad necessity. Furthermore, as a good libertarian, the Molinist agrees that God cannot just make free creatures freely do whatever he wants. But if God could choose which CFs were true, he could do exactly that; so, creaturely CFs must be contingent truths over which God has no control. According to Molinism, then, it is as

though God “wakes up” to find certain contingent things true — there is an independent source of contingent fact at work “before” God has a chance to do anything about it. Although Molinists may reject such talk as tendentiously impious, there is an important (and potentially troubling) truth behind it. The Molinist conditionals really are supposed to be contingent truths *discovered* by God, not determined by Him; and discovered “before” He creates — at least, “before” in the order of explanatory priority. Thus, according to Molinism, if God wants to create free creatures, he does face certain limitations — despite the fact that he never actually “takes risks”. God might turn out to be incredibly *unlucky* in the CFs with which he is forced to make do; although he does not *take* risks, he is nevertheless *subject to risk*.<sup>17</sup> This fact is important to latter day Molinists, like Alvin Plantinga; it enables them to deploy the traditional “Free Will Defense” against the problem of evil — and, in fact, to deploy it in a way that will ultimately prove important to my anti-Molinist argument.<sup>18</sup>

There is a striking contrast between the Molinist’s use of the free will defense and that of the Open Theist or defender of simple foreknowledge. The Open Theist says God *literally* had to wait to see what I would freely do. He simply did not know, and could not know, what I would freely choose before he gave me the opportunity. So, how can he be blamed for allowing wrong choices, freely taken? The advocate of simple foreknowledge has the following to say about the origin of moral evil: God could not insure that I always (freely) do what is right, because he had to decide to create me and to put me in circumstances of free choice on the basis of only a part of his foreknowledge — a part that did not include knowledge of my actual choice. On the simple foreknowledge view, God does not have to “wait to see what I will do” before he knows

how things turn out, at least not *literally*; but, metaphorically, that is exactly what this sort of libertarian thinks God must do. Both Open Theist and simple-foreknowledge advocate say that God's decision to create free creatures was made under the risk of moral evil; but he had to make the decision despite the risk, if he wanted a world with free creatures and all the virtues that only free creatures can display. Obviously, some of us have badly abused our freedom; but, on either of these views, God had to give us opportunity to sin *before* (either literally or metaphorically) he knew that evil would result.

The Molinist, by contrast, denies that God ran any risk when he decided to create free agents. Nevertheless, since the CFs are contingent, and not under God's control, it is possible for them to prevent him from creating worlds he would very much like to have been able to create. God is dealt a certain set of CFs, says the Molinist; and he might find himself having to make the best of a very bad hand — so bad, that he simply could not create groups of free creatures facing significant moral dilemmas and always freely choosing well. (When the CFs about a certain possible creature turn out in this way, the creature has caught a bad case of what Plantinga calls “transworld depravity”, a syndrome to be described in more detail below.) Why does the Molinist think that every group of possible free creatures could have turned out to be “transworld depraved”? It is assumed, at least by contemporary Molinists, that the way to generate the sets of CFs representing “hands” God is “dealt” in some possible world or other is by running through every consistent combination of CFs. This assumption, discussed in more detail below, will be essential to my argument against Molinism.

Another thing to notice at this point is that CFs are supposed to allow God to *avoid risk* and *maximize control* over creatures that nevertheless remain genuinely free. If God knows what I would do when confronted with a certain sort of choice in a wide variety of circumstances, he can select the circumstances in which I would make the choice he most wants me to make, and avoid the ones in which I would make the choices he dislikes. The Molinistic theory of providence gives God much more control over me, and over the course of history as a whole, than the other two libertarian accounts of providence just described. This might seem to make the Molinist's God just as manipulative and coercive as the Calvinist's. But the Molinist will point out that God cannot just make us do whatever he likes; there is much about our free actions over which he has no control, due to his failure to be able to choose which CFs are true. Furthermore, the Molinist can plausibly maintain that, when God causes me to be in circumstances in which he knows I will freely do such-and-such, my going on to do such-and-such is not caused by God's putting me in those circumstances — at least, not in the more robust senses of "causing" that are likely to threaten freedom. Granted, if one accepts a counterfactual theory of causation, and the CFs are counterfactuals, then this conclusion will be hard to avoid; but, otherwise, the Molinist ought to be able to say that God brings about a *necessary condition* of my choosing in the way I do, and it is only in that benign and uncontroversial sense that God can be said to cause my choice.

This description of Molinism and the motivations of its contemporary defenders should serve as a sufficiently detailed backdrop for the anti-Molinist argument to come.

### III. The Conditionals of Freedom

*Are CFs Counterfactuals, Subjunctives, or Something Else?*

What kinds of conditionals are CFs? What conditionals will do the job for which Molinist's need them? The examples I have used have been subjunctives, like "If Eve were tempted, she would sin"; but that choice is not completely uncontroversial.

Plantinga called them "counterfactuals of freedom" and the name has stuck. The name "counterfactual" suggests that such conditionals must have antecedents that are "contrary-to-fact". But conditionals with *true* antecedents must be among the CFs available when God decided whom to create and in what circumstances. Furthermore, it is tempting to say that, at that stage, it was "not yet settled" which CFs would have true antecedents; and so "not yet settled" which ones would be contrary-to-fact. In that case, none of the CFs known by God at the first stage would be counterfactuals — if "counterfactual" really does mean "contrary-to-fact". Consider the conditional: "Had Eve been tempted by a toad, she would not have sinned." If its truth directly implies that Eve is never tempted by a toad, then its truth is presumably dependent upon God's not putting her in such circumstances; and in that case, it would not be available to God, prior to his decision to tempt her with a snake rather than a toad — at least, it is not something God knows at that stage, if there is to be any deep explanation of God's choice.

But perhaps the proposition expressed by this conditional sentence does not imply that Eve never be tempted by a toad; perhaps there is a more-or-less grammatical notion of "counterfactual" that does not require that a true counterfactual have a false antecedent. As David Lewis has pointed out,<sup>19</sup> there are situations in which a conditional

like, “If Jones had been at the party, it would have raged until dawn”, can be used to say something true, even though Jones *was* at the party. Usually when a person asserts something using this form of words, she expects the antecedent to be false; but perhaps such a statement can be true even when the expectation is not met. (Imagine the following response to someone who asserts the above counterfactual: “What you said is true, but not for the reason you think; you see, unbeknownst to you, Jones arrived shortly after you left, and the party didn’t fizzle out, like it seemed to be doing.”) If we use “counterfactual” to describe the grammatical and other linguistic features that distinguish these conditionals from other varieties (and not simply to mean or even to imply “contrary-to-fact”), then Lewis’s examples suggest that the CFs with true antecedents could be truly, albeit misleadingly, expressed as counterfactual conditionals.

But controversy over this question need not detain us. There are conditionals that will play the role Molinists assign to CFs, and that clearly need not have false antecedents to be true — namely, subjunctive conditionals. Suppose that, at a stage prior to God’s decision to create Adam and Eve, the following subjunctive conditionals were true: (1) If Eve were tempted by a snake in such-and-such circumstances (ones that eventually came about), then she would sin; and (2) If Eve were tempted by a toad in such-and-such circumstances, then she would not sin. The Molinist who uses subjunctive conditionals for CFs can suppose that both were true, and available to serve among God’s reasons for creating anything at all, let alone Eve and a snake. The second turned out to have a contrary-to-fact antecedent, and the former did not; so, if (contra Lewis) counterfactuals must be contrary-to-fact to be true, the Molinist can appeal to subjunctive conditionals instead of counterfactuals.

But must CFs be either counterfactuals or subjunctive conditionals? In English, at any rate, the only alternative is indicative conditionals, such as: If Eve is tempted by a snake, then she sins; and if Eve is tempted by a toad, then she does not sin. Could a Molinist plausibly claim that CFs are not subjunctives or counterfactuals, but indicative conditionals, instead? The only contemporary Molinist I know of who explicitly claims that CFs can be indicative conditionals is Richard Gaskin; but he thinks the indicatives in question have the same truth-conditions as closely related subjunctive conditionals, and he generally uses subjunctives as his paradigm cases.<sup>20</sup> At least one *opponent* of Molinism thinks the kinds of “conditionals of deliberation” available to the Molinist’s God should be construed as indicative rather than subjunctive.<sup>21</sup> Molinists have been happy with counterfactual or subjunctive CFs, and I will follow their lead. But, in an appendix, I argue that using indicatives as CFs would not help the Molinist to escape my argument.

I shall assume, then, that CFs are subjunctive or counterfactual conditionals — albeit ones that are rather unlike those we use to describe everyday events. Consider an ordinary subjunctive conditional: If I were to strike the match, it would light. This sort of claim will be true in some circumstances, false in others. The standard story about the truth conditions of such conditionals, due to Robert Stalnaker and David Lewis, goes more or less as follows<sup>22</sup>: Take the actual world up to the time of the potential striking; change it just enough, if change is needed, to include the striking (and of course, if the conditional is contrary-to-fact, some change *will* be needed); and then “see” whether the match lights in the “nearest” world that results from following this recipe. How exactly to determine “nearness” (which dimensions of similarity to weigh more heavily than

others) is a vexed issue, as is the question whether one should assume that there always *is* a “nearest world”. But two things seem clear enough: similarity of the laws of nature must play a particularly important role in determining nearness<sup>23</sup>; and differences that are later than the effect should almost always be ignored. A further common assumption, which the Molinist will question, is that the “hypothetical” facts about a world, such as facts about which subjunctives are true there, must supervene upon the “categorical” facts about the space of possible worlds. Suppose that, in the actual world, an opportunity arises for striking a match, and it is not taken. To figure out what would have happened, had the match been struck, one looks to possible worlds that have pasts very much like our world, but that are just different enough to include the striking. Take two such worlds, W1 and W2; in W1, the match lights, but in W2, it does not. It would be “cheating”, on the usual interpretation of the Stalnaker-Lewis semantics, to say that W1 is closer to actuality just in virtue of the fact that, in the actual world and in W1, it is true that, if the match were struck, it would light; but in W2, this conditional is obviously false. To appeal to this subjunctive similarity between W1 and the actual world would be to render the truth of this particular subjunctive “brute” — it leaves a hypothetical fact not “grounded” in the categorical. I will not attempt to say anything precise about the “categorical”/“hypothetical” distinction, but simply help myself to the notion of “sameness of categorical history”.

The standard way to apply the Stalnaker-Lewis approach to the case of the match would lead one to say things like: If the match is in fact wet, then, clearly, it would not light if struck, because the nearest world in which it is struck is one in which it is still wet. If oxygen has in fact been evacuated from the room, again, the answer to “Would it

light, if it were struck?” is, no, since worlds with oxygen in the room are quite unlike the actual world. If, on the other hand, all conditions are right for lighting the match, so that the slightest scrape, together with laws like ours, imply combustion, then, yes, it would light if struck; in the nearest worlds with a match strike, its occurrence, plus the very similar laws and the relevantly similar conditions, together require that the world contain a lit match. Another possibility, however, is that the match does not do the same thing in all of the nearest worlds satisfying the hypothesis that I strike the match; that, in some of the nearest worlds, the match lights, while in others it does not. One might think this could only happen if determinism is false; but that is not so. Even if determinism happened to be true, our conditional claims would often turn out to be false — or at least not true — because of ties for the title “nearest world” generated by the vagueness of ordinary language. Suppose the match head has very little inflammable material left on it, or that it is slightly damp on one side. There are some very specific ways of striking it that, together with certain actual, deterministic laws of nature, require its ignition, and others that require its failing to ignite. But the hypothesis that I strike the match is, inevitably, a rather vague one. We lack words for all the hyper-precise ways to strike a match, and some of the differences among these ways would matter, in this case.

Suppose “strike” is indeterminate between ways of striking that definitely would light the match and ways that definitely would not; and that nothing else about me or my situation decisively favors one of the successful strikings or one of the duds. In that case, if the actual world does not include the match’s being struck on this occasion, the right answer to the question, “Would the match light if I were to strike it?” would seem, again, to be *no* — or, at the very least, it should *not* be a definite *yes*.<sup>24</sup> In some of the nearest worlds

the match lights, and in some it does not; so, by the Stalnaker-Lewis semantics, it cannot be true that it *would* light — only that it *might*.

Keep thinking of me, and the match, in these same “iffy” circumstances; and let “strike” remain vague, indeterminate between the successful and unsuccessful striking styles. Now consider the truth or falsehood of the subjunctive conditional “If I were to strike the match, it would light” on the supposition that the match actually is struck and, as luck would have it, struck in one of those ways that would cause it to ignite. Intuitions diverge about the general way to ascribe truth-conditions to a subjunctive conditional with true antecedent and consequent. Lewis’s official view is that, when antecedent and consequent are both true, a subjunctive conditional is automatically true — although its truth may in that case be due entirely to the truth of the antecedent and consequent, not to any interesting connection between the facts they report. Suppose someone had said, early in 1963, “If C. S. Lewis were to die on November 22, 1963, then John F. Kennedy would, too.” The conditional is true, (David) Lewis would say, though not because of any important connection between the two events. Its truth is due to two independent facts: C. S. Lewis died on November 22, 1963, and so did J. F. K. Others would say that a conditional like this one is false, and Lewis confesses to feeling a slight tug in that direction. To give in to it (as I am inclined to do) would be to accept the fact that sometimes there are worlds that, although they are different from the actual world, are nevertheless as close to it as it is to itself, for purposes of assessing subjunctives.

Consider what each of these parties will say about the case in which the vague hypothesis (*that I strike the match*) is true, and the match actually ignites, although the match could just as well have been struck in ways that would not have caused it to light:

Those who favor Lewis's official account of subjunctives with true antecedent and consequent will say that the conditional about the match is in fact true; although they must admit that its truth depends upon the truth of both antecedent and consequent; those who favor the latter approach should simply deny that it is true, no different than a subjunctive about the striking of this sort of match in these sorts of circumstances when it is contrary-to-fact. As luck would have it, the match was struck and flame resulted, they will say; but it could just as easily have been struck without producing a flame; so "If I were to strike the match, it would ignite" is false (or at least not true). What is true is merely that, if I were to strike the match, it *might* ignite...but, then again, it might not.

The usual way to apply the Stalnaker-Lewis approach to subjunctives and counterfactuals about indeterministic processes treats a hypothetical event that has some chance of causing one outcome, and some chance of causing another, as relevantly similar to the case of the vague hypothesis *that I strike the match* in the circumstances just described. In both sorts of case, when the antecedent of the conditional is false, some of the nearest worlds that make the antecedent true are ones in which the consequent is true as well; while others, though equally near, make the consequent false. Suppose that there are two worlds in which the imagined striking occurs in exactly the same way in all relevant physical respects; but the actual laws governing situations like this are indeterministic, leaving it up in the air whether the match will ignite. In that case, there would seem to be two worlds, equally "nearby", containing the striking together with the actual laws, plus as much of the categorical past as can be retained consistently with the supposition that the match is struck; and, in one of these worlds the match lights while in the other it does not. If nearness of world is determined by categorical similarity of past

and laws alone, then, in the indeterministic case, neither world is closer to the actual world. And if so, the conditional “If the match were struck, then it would light” is false. Instead, it is merely true that, if the match were struck, it *might* light...but, then again, it might not.

In the case of a subjunctive conditional with true antecedent and consequent describing an indeterministic striking and ignition, the same two alternatives present themselves as in the case of the similar conditional infected by vagueness: either the relevant subjunctive conditional is true, but in a way that depends upon the truth of antecedent and consequent, and not because of a deep connection between the two events they describe; or it is false, because worlds with a striking and no ignition are just as close, for the purposes of assessing such conditionals, as the actual world is to itself.

Now, the libertarian thinks there is indeterminism at work in our choices. Suppose a libertarian accepts the Stalnaker-Lewis account of the truth conditions for counterfactuals and subjunctives about indeterministic situations, as just described. She will have to say that the conditional, “Were Eve tempted in such-and-such specific ways (in conditions that leave her genuinely free), then she would freely sin”, is not true — at least, if Eve is never in fact tempted in this way. A libertarian who favors Lewis’s truth-conditions for subjunctives will allow that, if in fact she *is* so tempted, and she *does* freely sin, then the conditional will be true. But it is true, she will say, only because of the truth of both the antecedent and the consequent. Those who favor the other approach will say it is simply false, since Eve could “just as easily” have refrained from sinning. In any case, the libertarian who applies the Stalnaker-Lewis semantics in either of the standard ways to subjunctives about indeterministic outcomes will reach the same

conclusion: If, at the first stage, God only considers propositions that are true independently of his creative choices, that stage will not contain subjunctives about the outcomes of genuinely free choices. Such conditionals are either not true, or else their truth is dependent upon the truth of their antecedents — and therefore dependent upon God’s choice to create free creatures.

The Molinist, however, denies that this is the right way to think about the truth conditions for subjunctives describing what would happen in indeterministic settings — at least, the ones involving free creatures. There can be “brute facts” about what would happen if this or that indeterministic situation were to obtain — facts that are not settled by the nearness of worlds, at least if nearness is measured by the categorical facts about the past plus the (indeterministic) laws. According to the Molinist, it is simply a contingent fact that, if Eve were tempted in such-and-such ways (in conditions in which the outcome is left undetermined by the actual laws of nature), she would freely sin. It could have turned out otherwise, but that is how it is. And God knows this contingent fact; it is true independently of any choices God makes, and so is true in some worlds where Eve is never tempted in this way.

Philosophers attracted to the Stalnaker-Lewis semantics, as I have described it, will find it hard to stomach “brutely true” subjunctives and counterfactuals of this sort. They will draw an obvious moral from the comparison of conditionals about free choices with the conditionals about various match-lighting scenarios: subjunctive conditionals about indeterministic situations — including those describing what free creatures would do — cannot be available for God’s use at the first stage. The CFs that will turn out to be contrary-to-fact are simply not true; they are like the contrary-to-fact conditionals about

what the match would do under the assumption that the conditions and indeterministic laws do not settle whether it lights. The CFs that happen to have true antecedents and consequents might qualify as true, at some stage or other, though many will doubt even this. Still, their truth depends upon how things happen to go in the future, not upon a reliable linkage between the truth of the antecedent and that of the consequent. So these CFs, if true at all, are not true independently of God's decision to create; thus, they are not available at the first stage.

Most Molinists still pay lip service to the Stalnaker-Lewis semantics for counterfactuals by insisting that sameness of CFs is one important respect of similarity between worlds. But, at least for indeterministic situations involving agents, they deny that orthodox application of the semantics yields the correct truth conditions for subjunctives and counterfactuals. For now, I am prepared to grant them this departure from orthodoxy. What is important for the purposes of my argument is that Molinist CFs are "brutely true" — that is, not grounded in categorical facts about the past, plus the laws of nature.

#### *"Ultima facie" CFs*

Suppose the conditions explicitly mentioned in the antecedent of a brutally true CF leave out lots of (seemingly) irrelevant detail about the past. Suppose, for instance, that it is brutally true, before God decides whether to create Eve, that: (i) If Eve were tempted to sin while living in a garden, she would do so. This CF is silent about the size of the garden, the form of the temptation, the time at which the temptation occurs, and so on. Could (i) and the following two CFs all be brutally true together? (ii) If Eve were tempted

by a snake in a garden, she would sin, but (iii) if she were tempted by a toad in a garden, she would not. It is not obvious that the conjunction of the three cannot be true. On most accounts of the logic of subjunctives and counterfactuals, they do not obey “Antecedent Strengthening”. Letting “>” represent the connection between antecedent and consequent in a subjunctive conditional, and “A”, “B”, “C” stand in for declarative sentences (which are thought of as taking on the subjunctive mood when connected by “>”), the following schematic principle captures this fact about the logic of subjunctive conditionals: From  $A > C$  it does not follow that  $(A \& B) > C$ . Although one is tempted to see some kind of inconsistency between (i) and (iii), the antecedent of (iii) has more content than that of (i), and there is no straightforward problem with their both being true. (i), (ii), and (iii) might be like the trio: (a) If Bush were to resign today, Cheney would become president; (b) if Bush were to resign today and Mick Jagger were to die today, Cheney would become president; (c) if Bush were to resign today and Cheney were to die today, Cheney would not become president.

One objection to (i), (ii), and (iii)’s being true together is that they imply problematic subjunctives constraining God’s choices; for (i) and (iii) imply that: (iv) were Eve to be tempted by an animal in a garden, then she would not be tempted by a toad. The logic of subjunctive conditionals seems pretty clearly to support this form of inference: If  $A > B$  and  $(A \& C) > \sim B$ , then  $A > \sim C$ . But, according to the Molinist, CFs are consulted *before* God has chosen whether to create Eve, and *before* he has chosen whether to tempt her in a garden or on a boat, with a toad or with a goat, etc. And they are supposed to be true independently of God’s will. So, with (i), (ii), and (iii) brutally true independently of any resolutions or choices God has made, he knows that were he to

put Eve in a garden and allow her to be tempted, he would not choose a toad — at least, he knows this so long as we assume that simple inferences from things God knows at the first stage are also available at that stage.

I set these worries aside, however. The possibility of all three CFs being brutally true would imply that some CFs, although true, are not useful to God. Should God tempt Eve with a talking toad in a garden, in light of the brutal truth of (i), (ii), and (iii)? One might have thought that (i) would be all God needs to know, (ii) and (iii) providing more information than he needs. If he does not want her to sin, (i) counsels against tempting her in a garden by means of anything — snake, toad, goat, angel, etc. But does (i) really provide such counsel? No, not if it is consistent with (iii) being true *and equally relevant to God's choices*. Given that (iii) is brutally true as well, (i) becomes irrelevant to the specific question whether God should tempt her with a toad in a garden. As mentioned earlier, standard accounts of the logic of conditionals imply that (i) and (iii) together imply that, (iv) were she tempted in a garden, it would not be by means of a toad. But the truth of (i) and (iv), and God's desire that Eve not sin, do not provide any kind of reason for God not to tempt her with a talking toad, if (iii) is also true.

If (i), (ii), and (iii) can be brutally true together, the brutal truth of (i) by itself would not be the kind of CF God needs in making his plans. What God needs are CFs that do not switch from true to false when more details are added to their antecedents — and that is what happens to (i), if (iii) is also true. In order to have solid reasons for his creative decisions at the first stage — for instance, the decision not to tempt Eve in a garden *with a toad*, a choice God made “before” deciding whether to use a toad or snake if he tempts Eve in a garden — God needs true conditionals that can withstand a certain

kind of strengthening of the antecedent without changing truth-value. What kind of strengthening? Not just any old strengthening — for example, strengthenings of the antecedent that make it impossible, or impossible in conjunction with the consequent, are obviously irrelevant, whatever their effect might be on a conditional's truth-value. God need only worry about stronger antecedents if they produce a conditional that is relevant to God's pre-creation deliberation about whether to allow the choice in question. The choice is made at some "stage" in God's foreknowledge. At any given stage, there are many things "settled" and many others left "open", and a wide range of things God could choose to "settle" on the basis of nothing more than the knowledge in that stage.

Presumably, for any set of propositions that could represent a stage in God's foreknowledge, there are a variety of "complete actions" that God could decide to take on the basis of the knowledge in that stage alone. A complete action, relative to a stage, is a proposition satisfying two conditions: (1) God could decide to "make it true" on the basis of the knowledge in that stage (to use Plantinga's terminology, it corresponds to a state of affairs God could, at that stage, decide to "strongly actualize"), and (2) the result of this decision would be a new "stage" in God's foreknowledge — an *interestingly* new stage, one that contains more information than just what follows from the old stage and the fact that God took this decision. For a genuinely new stage to result, God's action must have left something undetermined that will be "settled" by events he does not directly bring about. Adding the knowledge of this outcome to the information God used in choosing his action results in a new stage of God's foreknowledge.

The useful CFs might be called “*ultima facie* CFs”. The notion of an *ultima facie* conditional can be defined schematically in terms of “complete actions relative to a stage”:

(UF) Relative to stage *S* in God’s foreknowledge, it is an *ultima facie* truth that  $A > B =_{df}$  (1) It is true that  $A > B$ ; and (2) for each complete action  $x$  that God could decide to take at stage *S*, and every proposition  $p$  that is known at stage *S*; if God’s deciding to do  $x$  is compatible with its being true that  $A$ , then the following conditional is true: If God were to do  $x$  and  $p$  were true and it was the case that  $A$ , then it would be that  $B$ .

If (i) can be brutally true in conjunction with the brutal truth of (iii), (i) would only be a *prima facie* reason not to put Eve in a garden to face temptation; it would provide no reason for God not to put her in a garden and tempt her by means of a *toad*. If, however, (i) were an *ultima facie* truth at the first stage, it would provide God with an *ultima facie* reason not to allow Eve to be tempted in a garden, whether by toad, snake, or any other means. Given everything else true at the first stage, and any complete action God could take compatible with Eve’s being tempted in a garden, were Eve to be tempted in a garden, she would sin.

As noted earlier, if God could know (i), (ii), and (iii) before he has decided whether to tempt Eve in a garden with a toad or snake, he would be able to know things from which any moderately intelligent person could infer that God will not use a toad in a garden *before* God himself has decided not to use a toad in a garden. Because of the

seeming absurdity of this result, I think the Molinist should say that every CF that is true at the first stage is an *ultima facie* conditional; so that, if (i) is brutally true at the first stage, (iii) cannot be, and vice versa. Whatever one thinks about this issue, however, only the *ultima facie* CFs true at the first stage will be of use to God as reasons for his creative choices. Since only *ultima facie* conditionals are of importance, the qualification will usually be dropped.

### *The Potential Relevance of Distant and Irrelevant Differences*

Suppose it is the case that, if I were to strike a certain match right now, then it would light — because all the conditions are right for lighting and the actual laws are deterministic, implying that even the feeblest of scrapes would generate a flame. In that case, one could add all sorts of descriptions of past and future circumstances to the antecedent of this subjunctive without changing the conditional's truth-value — so long as the changes do not have an impact upon what the laws would be like, or what events would occur in the spatiotemporal region of the match just prior to my striking it. If I were to strike the match and Bush were in the Whitehouse scratching his nose, then the match would light; if I were to strike it and Bush were in the Whitehouse napping, then the match would still light. What Bush does far away should not make a difference to the ignition of the match; if the facts added to the antecedent are sufficiently far-removed from the circumstances at hand, and if the laws of nature would not have to be different for these facts to obtain, then adding them will not affect the truth of the conditional. Why not? Because, in the deterministic case, with laws implying that effects are a function of local causes, the truth of the conditional is settled by the laws, the nature of

the hypothetical striking, and categorical facts involving causally relevant goings-on in the actual world just prior to the time at which the ignition would have taken place. Altering events far away will not make a difference, so long as nearby conditions (the dryness of the match, the presence of oxygen, etc.) and the laws of nature are held constant.

A similar moral follows in the indeterministic case, so long as subjunctive conditionals about indeterministic processes are treated in the orthodox way described earlier. Such conditionals turned out to be false, at least when contrary-to-fact, because worlds in which antecedent is true and consequent is true were no closer to the actual world than ones in which antecedent is true and consequent false. Adding descriptions of distant differences from the actual world, while keeping the laws and events near the indeterministic striking the same, should not help to make these conditionals true — at least, so long as the laws that actually govern the events in question are local in character, as they seem in general to be in the actual world. What is going on at a given place and time seems to depend mainly upon how things are in the vicinity just prior to that time.<sup>25</sup> If so, differences in conditions far away in space and time will not, typically, matter — unless they are differences that would require radically different laws of nature.

The Molinist could not use similar reasoning to show that her CFs are insensitive to trivial differences far away from the events described. The grounds for the truth of a CF are very different than the ones just described; they are not to be found in the vicinity of the effect, even if all causal influences are local. Adding causally irrelevant categorical details about the distant past to the antecedent of a CF may well produce a CF with a different truth-value — or so I shall argue. Here is an example of the sort of thing

I want to force the Molinist to allow. Suppose that it is not true (not *ultima facie* true, at any rate) that, if Eve were tempted by a snake in a garden, she would sin; so (ii), above, is false. The following CF could nevertheless be true: (v) If a certain angel sang a certain song one billion years prior to the events in the Garden of Eden, and Eve were tempted by a snake in a garden, then Eve would sin. Adding that little bit of causally irrelevant detail about the angel's song will, in some worlds, make the difference between a false and a true conditional. The reverse is possible, as well: a CF that says very little about the rest of the world might well be *ultima facie*, rendering such differences in distant detail inconsequential (this possibility is not strictly relevant to my argument). (i), for example, could be an *ultima facie* CF; in which case, it matters not what might have happened in the past or what might happen in the future, nor what sort of animal might be used to tempt Eve. So long as the temptation were in a garden, then she would succumb.

CFs should display this sort of elasticity because their truth is brute. The search for *ultima facie* CFs usable at the first stage is not a search for antecedent conditions that would be *sufficient* to *cause* a certain free decision. By hypothesis, the antecedent of a useful CF describes an indeterministic situation, and whatever further conditions are added must leave it so, if the choice described in the consequent remains free. Compare one possible complete history of the universe up to (but not including) the occurrence of a free choice, with another such complete history that differs only in some tiny way in the distant past (for example, a difference in the song an angel sings, or in the swerve of an atom, or in the motions of specks in a space-time that existed before the big bang). Does the truth of a CF with the one complete past as antecedent imply anything about the truth of a CF with the other past for antecedent? If the truth of one of the CFs were grounded

in categorical truths about the universe immediately prior to the choice, then distant past events could be relied upon not to make a difference, and either both CFs would be true or neither would be true. But the Molinist's CFs are not grounded in those sorts of local facts, and therefore similarity of local facts will not underwrite a necessary connection between the CFs with antecedents describing histories that differ only distantly. There are possible worlds in which these histories would be followed by one choice; and possible worlds in which they would be followed by another choice; so why not worlds in which the histories differ in the choices to which they would lead?

The Molinist might argue that, as a matter of necessity, the CFs must both be false or both true, because the differences in the antecedents are too distant from and irrelevant to the type of choice in question to make a difference to the outcome. This would be a strong claim: that some particular distant difference between two categorical histories could not possibly make a difference; or, to put it another way, that the disjunction of the two antecedents is, in every possible world, sufficiently detailed to yield a true *ultima facie* CF about what the agent would do. A Molinist who made this claim would confront the question: What is the distance beyond which one can ignore small differences in the categorical history of a choice? Is it a temporal one? A spatial one? Is the boundary set by some kind of limit on of the scale of the differences, relative to the size of the agent? Is it a complicated function of many such factors? I will let the expression "not differing beyond degree  $n$ " do duty for whatever particular limit a Molinist might propose; and make the simplifying assumption that all choices are between just two alternatives. Then, the thesis that there is a limit on the relevance of

past conditions to a given situation in which a free choice would occur can be expressed as follows:

(LIMIT) Consider any  $x$ ,  $e$ ,  $w$ ,  $H$ ,  $A$ , and  $B$ , such that:  $e$  is a free choice between alternative actions  $A$  and  $B$  on the part of agent  $x$  in possible world  $w$ , and  $H$  is the complete categorical history of  $w$  prior to  $e$ . There is a set of complete categorical histories,  $H^*$ , that includes  $H$  and all histories of worlds that differ from it less than degree  $n$ , and, in every possible world, one or the other of these is an *ultima facie* CF: (a) if  $x$  were to choose between  $A$  and  $B$  after one of the histories in  $H^*$ ,  $x$  would choose  $A$ ; or (b) if  $x$  were to choose between  $A$  and  $B$  after one of the histories in  $H^*$ ,  $x$  would choose  $B$ .

But where are we to suppose the boundary lies between the prior conditions that are relevant, and the prior conditions that are not relevant? What should take the place of “ $n$ ”? The standard Stalnaker-Lewis semantics for subjunctives does not imply LIMIT, for any value of  $n$ . Because free choices are (by hypothesis) always the result of indeterministic processes, a complete description of all the causally relevant nearby categorical conditions plus the laws of nature does not settle the truth of a CF concerning a person’s free choice. Every enrichment of the antecedent by means of categorical facts about further, more distant events is a different conditional about an indeterministic situation, its truth still ungrounded, according to the orthodox Stalnaker-Lewis account of such conditionals. Could the Molinist suppose that some version of LIMIT is a

metaphysical necessity, nevertheless? The problem with doing so is that every choice of a limit on what is relevant seems arbitrary; but arbitrary cut-offs are poor candidates for metaphysical necessities (to put it mildly); and LIMIT must be necessary, if true at all. It purports to describe the space of possible worlds, and so is not something that could be true in one and false in another.<sup>26</sup>

Where might the Molinist suppose the spatiotemporal limit lies — the border beyond which categorical facts could be added to or subtracted from the antecedent of a CF with no possible danger of producing a CF of differing truth-value? How far away, spatiotemporally or otherwise, can categorical facts be and still “make a difference”, in this sense, to CFs? A Molinist might, I suppose, think that only adding or subtracting categorical information about events within the past lightcone of a point could be relevant to what would have happened at that point. I will grant this much of a restriction, for the sake of argument, at least. Still, if the causal process leading up to an indeterministic event is continuous, there is no such thing as *the* set of immediately preceding causally relevant conditions that fall within the event’s past lightcone. Suppose that *R* is the space-time location at which a certain agent makes a free decision. Had everything been the same in regions arbitrarily close to *R* within *R*’s rearward lightcone, the circumstances would still have been perfect for an indeterministic decision of exactly the same general character at *R* (or at *R*’s counterpart, in the somewhat altered situation). Which arbitrarily chosen portion of the rearward lightcone should be regarded as the boundary of “what matters” to the truth of CFs describing the hypothetical act of choosing that occurs at *R*?

Processes filling relativistic space-time might appear to be continuous, admitting no natural answer to this question; but perhaps the lesson of quantum theory should be

taken to be the rejection of such continuity. Would it be easier for the Molinist to insist upon the necessity of LIMIT if there were a minimum length to the causally relevant conditions leading up to any event? Could the set of all events “one quantum-interval earlier” serve as a non-arbitrary boundary around the past history of an event, a limit before which categorical differences could not possibly make a difference to the truth-values of CFs?

One problem with the quantum-unit proposal is that, in order to block LIMIT by appeal to such a boundary, the Molinist would have to suppose that time is *necessarily* quantized — a highly problematic assumption, surely. But, really, it does not matter whether a Molinist tries to use some minimal prior interval in quantized space-time or a (seemingly arbitrary) short interval (say, one minute) in continuous space-time as the boundary of the categorical conditions that can make a difference in CFs. Neither choice of a limit is acceptable.

The reason neither a quantum interval nor a minute nor a second will serve as value for  $n$  is that they conflict with the repeatability, at least in principle, of the categorical circumstances just prior to a given free choice. However unlikely it might be that an individual find herself in precisely the same categorical conditions more than once, there is nothing absolutely impossible in the supposition that it should happen. If the categorical content of one quantum-unit, or one second, or one minute prior to the conclusion of an indeterministic process is — as a matter of necessity — enough to settle CFs about which outcome would happen; then, in any world where that categorical content occurs again and again, the outcome must be the same every time. But, on the hypothesis that the process leading up to a choice is an indeterministic one, repeated

occurrences of exactly the same process *can* lead to different outcomes — and so, there are possible worlds in which they *do*. It follows that a categorical description of the final minute, second, or quantum-unit leading up to the conclusion of an indeterministic process is not enough to generate a true CF specifying what would happen under those conditions — at least, it is not enough as a matter of *necessity*.

What I am arguing for in this section is that the Molinist's commitment to brutally true CFs requires the falsehood of LIMIT. Consider any categorical description *H* of the past leading up to a circumstance of free choice in some possible world. Denying LIMIT means that, however detailed *H* might be, if the description does not completely specify every categorical aspect of the past, then there are details that can be added to *H* that would, *in some possible worlds*, “make a difference”. In other words, it is *possible* that a CF with *H* categorically enriched in one way is true, while a CF with *H* categorically enriched in a different way is false. Denying LIMIT does not imply that tiny differences *necessarily* matter; nor even that they *actually* matter. For instance, I suppose that, if the Molinist's general picture is right, there is a world in which only ten minutes matters; that is, for every possible indeterministic choice on the part of every possible creature, a sufficiently detailed categorical description of the previous ten minutes would be enough to yield a true CF about what the creature would choose. My conclusion is secured so long as there are also worlds in which ten minutes is not enough, though perhaps twenty is; and worlds in which twenty minutes is not enough, though perhaps thirty is; etc.

### *A Vague Limit?*

William Lane Craig has suggested (in conversation) that the Molinist could respond in something like the following way: There are nearby categorical differences that can make a difference to the truth of CFs, and there are distant trivialities that cannot possibly make a difference; but there may be no precise cut-off between differences that can and cannot make a difference. The boundary is simply vague, like the difference between a heap of stones and a few stones that are not big enough to be a heap. In order to be relevant to my claims here, the point of this Molinistic rebuttal would have to be that LIMIT can be true even if it is vague — i.e., even though there is no *precise* limit to the distance at which trivialities can make a difference, no precise value for  $n$ . Some values of  $n$  will make LIMIT definitely true (there are distances beyond which it is, in every possible world, unnecessary to go); others will yield a version of LIMIT that is definitely false; but some intermediate values of  $n$  make LIMIT indeterminate in truth-value.

The reply I am (perhaps wrongly) attributing to Craig implies the following: For some history  $H$ , and degree of difference  $n$ , there is a categorical history  $H^*$  differing from  $H$  by no more than  $n$ ; there is a pair of otherwise identical CFs, with  $H$  and  $H^*$  for antecedent; and it is indeterminate whether the two CFs have the same truth-value. For it to be indeterminate whether both are true or both are false, at least one of them must itself be indeterminate in truth-value. Where could this indeterminacy come from with respect to the two CFs in question? There are, I take it, two possibilities, given that our attention is restricted to providentially useful CFs: vagueness in the concepts used (by God!) to formulate the conditionals, or “objective vagueness in the world” — indeterminacy that is not due to imprecision in anyone’s concepts or language. But both sources of vagueness

render a CF unfit for God's use. The CFs at issue are only *ultima facie* CFs that could serve as the basis for God's creative decisions. God will surely not act upon sloppily formulated or imprecise information, especially when the imprecision can make a difference to his plans. And if it is *objectively* uncertain whether a given history will lead to a certain outcome, bringing about that history will not give God the sort of risk-free providential control over the outcome of the choice that Molinists attribute to him.

For concreteness, suppose that the only relevant factor is time, and that  $n$  is exact similarity with respect to the previous 24 hours — i.e., suppose that a complete categorical specification of the universe for 24 hours prior to a choice is enough to yield, in every case, a determinate CF to the effect that, if the previous 24 hours were like *that*, the agent would freely do thus-and-so. And suppose that anything less than a complete categorical description of the previous 23 hours will not insure, in every possible world, that there is a definitely true *ultima facie* CF telling God what the creature would freely do in the circumstances described — replacing  $n$  with “exact similarity with respect to the previous 23 hours”, for example, turns LIMIT into a falsehood. But there are values of  $n$  between these two that make LIMIT indeterminate in truth-value — an area of indeterminacy in between complete specifications of 24 and 23 hours, in which it can become indeterminate whether differences in the conditions leading up to a choice are relevant. Perhaps, for example, substituting “exact similarity of history during 23 hours and 30 minutes prior to the choice” for  $n$  yields a version of LIMIT that is neither definitely true nor definitely false. If  $p$  is a complete categorical specification of the world for 23 hours and 30 minutes prior to a choice of Eve's, “If  $p$  is true, then Eve freely sins” will be neither true nor false in at least *some* possible worlds.

I fail, however, to see how positing this area of indeterminacy takes away the sting of accepting LIMIT. In this idealized example, God cannot, in every possible world, ignore differences greater than 23 hours prior to a choice. It is still a necessary truth that there is a limit beyond which little differences in the antecedents of CFs cannot possibly make a difference to their providential usefulness. And, as I argued above, no natural basis for a necessary truth of this sort can be found in the case of circumstances leading up to indeterministic events. However much vagueness one posits (e.g., seventeen levels of higher-order vagueness), the CFs God *uses* cannot tolerate *any* amount of vagueness. On the vague-limit hypothesis, there will still be a boundary between, on the one hand, antecedents that describe the world (prior to a choice) so thoroughly that they yield determinately true *ultima facie* CFs in every possible world; and, on the other hand, antecedents that are not sufficiently detailed to insure determinately true CFs in every possible world. I do not see that the introduction of objective indeterminacy in CFs has made acceptance of such a boundary any easier to swallow; the arbitrariness of any line that could be drawn makes every candidate for *n* a poor choice, and the corresponding version of LIMIT an unlikely candidate for being necessarily true — or even necessarily indeterminate.

#### **IV. The Anti-Molinist Argument**

##### *Stage One: The Possibility of “Divine Voodoo Worlds”*

My strategy is to argue as follows: On Molinist principles, there is a possible world in which every possible choice of every possible creature could be controlled by God’s

fiddling with irrelevant details of the creation far removed from those creatures in space and time. In such worlds, not only *could* God control us, he *would be* controlling us. Every possible creature would be subject to something I will call “transworld manipulability”. Perhaps the likelihood of such a world’s being the case is comparable to the likelihood of Plantinga’s hypothesis of transworld depravity (or transworld sanctity). But if transworld depravity is possible, so is transworld manipulability; and the mere fact that Molinism implies the possibility of transworld manipulability is, I claim, bad enough.

I shall make some simplifying assumptions about what possible worlds with free creatures are like, trusting that the simplifications will make no difference to the argument. I shall assume that every possible world with free creatures has a “first family” — the group of creatures who first exercise freedom. I shall pretend that there are no possible worlds with infinite pasts in which, for any given time, infinitely many free choices have already been made before that time. I shall also pretend that free choices are always between two alternatives. On these assumptions, when God considers whether to create free creatures, he will be running through infinitely many “first families”, beings that can be created together. Assuming, with Plantinga, that there are individual essences for merely possible creatures, each first family is represented by a set of essence. (A way to formulate CFs about “merely possible creatures” without recourse to Plantinga’s haecceitistic essences is mentioned in note 15, above.)

For every possible first family, the Molinist posits CFs about their first choices. A CF about the first choice of a creature need not specify the entire past history of the universe in which the choice is made; in some possible worlds, there are *ultima facie* CFs

about the first choices that merely describe circumstances obtaining during the seconds leading up to the choice. But, because LIMIT is false, there are others where the world's history long before the choice matters a great deal; for CFs with antecedents that differ only minutely in their descriptions of much earlier events can imply that different choices are made. I shall assume that, by specifying the "complete categorical past" leading up to a choice in the antecedent of a CF about that choice, one could eventually arrive at a true CF about what choice would be made. I assume this because, if events causally downstream from the choice are allowed to be among the factors relevant to the truth of CFs about the choice, and some of these include facts that depend upon the character of the choice that is made, the resulting CF might well be of limited providential usefulness. For example, suppose that neither of the following conditionals is an *ultima facie* CF that God can use at the first stage:

- (A) If Eve were offered an apple at a time  $t$  in a world with a complete categorical past of type  $H$ , then she would freely accept it; and
- (B) If Eve were offered an apple at a time  $t$  in a world with a complete categorical past of type  $H$ , then she would freely reject it.

And suppose that the only way to enrich the contents of one of these antecedents in such a way that the resulting CF is true would be by adding information about whether Eve is eating an apple shortly after  $t$ . Could God make use of this kind of CF:

- (C) If Eve were offered an apple at  $t$  in a world with a past of type  $H$  and were eating an apple shortly after  $t$  as a result of this choice, then she would freely accept the apple at  $t$ ?

Presumably not, since God could not insure that the antecedent is true except by insuring that Eve chooses to eat the apple — and that he cannot do, in the absence of other CFs by means of which to control this choice.

Could the following CF be providentially useful to God, if it were the only CF relevant to the control of Eve's choice at  $t$ :

- (C) If Eve were offered an apple at  $t$  in a world with a past of type  $H$  and she were found chewing on an apple shortly after  $t$ , then she would freely accept the apple at  $t$ ?

Since God cannot, given libertarian scruples, cause her chewing by causing her (free) choice, in order to use (C) he must somehow insure that, whether or not Eve were to choose to eat the apple, she would still be chewing an apple shortly after  $t$ . This would limit God's ability to respond to Eve's choice — no matter what she does, he has to either allow or force her to eat an apple. So, from the Molinist's point of view, it would be best if God could control every possible free choice by means of CFs with antecedents describing just the categorical past relative to the choice. Unsurprisingly, Molinists assume that God has the CFs to do this.<sup>27</sup>

The complete categorical history of the universe prior to the first free choices is what I shall call an “initial world-type”. For any first family with members  $x, y, z, \dots$ , and any initial world-type  $A$  in which  $x, y, z, \dots$  could co-exist and be the first family, there will be a series of CFs with the occurrence of  $A$  for antecedent, and the free choices that would be made by  $x, y, z, \dots$ , for their consequents. Since the initial world type  $A$  leaves each of their choices indeterministically “open”, and God does not cause them to do one thing rather than another, there must be possible worlds in which the members make every possible combination of choices. So, in those worlds at any rate, there are true CFs affirming that  $x, y, z, \dots$ , would make that combination of choices in an  $A$ -world. If those CFs are not *actually* true, a world in which  $A$  occurs and they make that combination of choices will not be one that God could bring about; it is not a “feasible” world (to use Thomas Flint’s terminology). Still, the possible world is “out there”, and so the CFs that God would have known in such a world must be possible.

Suppose that every first family contains a finite number of individuals,  $n$ , each one of whom will face an initial undetermined choice between two options. That requires, for each initial world-type  $A$ ,  $2^n$  possible combinations of CFs describing what everyone would choose in  $A$ . Let us suppose that, in fact, our first family included just two people — call them “Adam” and “Eve” — and that their first free choices were whether to accept and eat an apple, or to refrain from doing so. To simplify things further, suppose that these choices were made simultaneously and independently. In that case, for each initial world-type  $A$ , there are only four possible combinations of CFs specifying what the pair would do.

- (a) A>Adam accepts, A>Eve accepts
- (b) A>Adam refrains, A>Eve refrains
- (c) A>Adam refrains, A>Eve accepts
- (d) A>Adam accepts, A>Eve refrains

Suppose (a) is the case, and that refraining is the blameless choice. Suppose, too, that *A* includes many objects far away from Adam and Eve, the disposition of which is relatively inconsequential to God's purposes; and that there are three trivial changes in these distant things yielding initial world-types *A1*, *A2*, *A3* – circumstances in which Adam and Eve would also have existed and have faced the same choices. This generates further possible combinations of CFs:

- (a1) A1>Adam accepts, A1>Eve accepts
- (b1) A1>Adam refrains, A1>Eve refrains
- (c1) A1>Adam refrains, A1>Eve accepts
- (d1) A1>Adam accepts, A1>Eve refrains

- (a2) A2>Adam accepts, A2>Eve accepts
- (b2) A2>Adam refrains, A2>Eve refrains
- (c2) A2>Adam refrains, A2>Eve accepts
- (d2) A2>Adam accepts, A2>Eve refrains

- (a3) A3>Adam accepts, A3>Eve accepts

(b3) A3>Adam refrains, A3>Eve refrains

(c3) A3>Adam refrains, A3>Eve accepts

(d3) A3>Adam accepts, A3>Eve refrains

Because LIMIT is false, there are possible worlds in which these little changes in the initial world-types generate differences in the CFs specifying what Adam and Eve would do. So, there is a world in which *A*>Adam accepts, but *AI*>Adam refrains; and one in which *A*>Adam refrains and *AI*>Adam accepts. And likewise for Eve. Furthermore, since their choices are made independently, and the CFs describing what they would do are brute facts, each combination of CFs about Adam and Eve should be possible, as well — every combination that results from taking one pair of CFs with *A* for antecedent, another pair of CFs with *AI* for antecedent, etc.

The fact that these CFs are brutally true is relevant to the plausibility of the recombination principle I have just affirmed. If they were subjunctives grounded in categorical facts about similarity of worlds, one might think that, if the difference between *A* and *AI* is enough to make a difference to the question whether Adam would sin, then it might well be the sort of difference that would require a change in what Eve would do as well. If evacuating the air in a room would make a difference to whether one match would light, it ought to make a difference to whether another, similar match would light in that same room. Since the categorical facts described in *A* (together with categorical facts about the actual world) are not sufficient to determine which CFs are

true, there is no reason to expect that the CFs about Adam and Eve should be linked in such a way that certain combinations are ruled out.

We can easily test whether contemporary Molinists ought to accept my principle of recombination: Are they prepared to make use of Alvin Plantinga's Molinistic version of the Free Will Defense? If so, then they have no right to balk at my assertion that, given Molinism, all these combinations are possible. In his Free Will Defense, Plantinga makes a certain claim about the way CFs could have turned out for every possible free creature.<sup>28</sup> Pretend that Adam and Eve are the only possible people, that A, A1, A2, and A3 are the only possible initial world states compatible with their existence, and that their first choices are the only important ones they could make. Given these radical simplifying assumptions, Plantinga's claim amounts to the insistence that the following combination of CFs is a possible one:

TD: (a), (a1), (a2), (a3) (Transworld depravity)

Assuming Adam and Eve exhaust the possible free creatures, if the CFs had turned out to be TD, then, if God wanted to create free creatures at all, he would have to create free creatures each of whom sinned. Plantinga uses the possibility of TD to show that, given libertarianism about freedom, it is possible that there be no way for God to insure that everyone always freely does what is right — even a God who exercises absolute providential control over his creation by Molinistic means. Now, an opponent of Plantinga's Free Will Defense might claim that TD is not a possible combination of CFs.

The *truly* unreasonable opponent might even propose that, although TD is not possible, the following combination *is* possible:

TS: (b), (b1), (b2), (b3) (Transworld sanctity)

So, according to this unreasonable opponent, God could not possibly have been stuck in the extreme transworld depravity scenario, with CFs implying that every possible individual sins upon every opportunity; but he could have found himself with CFs implying that they always do the right thing. It would only be slightly more reasonable to claim that neither TD nor TS is a possible combination, though all the intermediate combinations are possible. But neither response to Plantinga seems reasonable. Given the assumption of Molinism, and the brutality of its CFs, Plantinga is right to suppose that every combination, including TD, is a genuine possibility.<sup>29</sup>

Of course most of the combinations will be a mixed bag. Most, unlike TD and TS, allow God to choose initial states in which Adam and Eve would make different choices, and different choices from one another. Some will allow God to decide whether to have Adam or Eve sin, but not allow him to create a world in which both or neither sin. But the following sort of world would allow God complete control over the way Adam and Eve behave:

TM: (a), (b1), (c2), (d3) (Transworld manipulability)

In this case, each possible combination of free choices open to Adam and Eve can be selected by God. All he need do is fiddle with the tiny, distant differences between *A*, *A1*, *A2*, and *A3*. The worlds in which all essences display transworld manipulability might be called “Divine Voodoo” worlds, because the CFs that happen to be true provide God with the analogue of a set of voodoo dolls or a remote control device — whatever he wants Adam and Eve or any other creature to do, he can insure that they do it by manipulating insignificant details of the creation far away from the creatures themselves. For the moment, I shall continue to pretend that Adam and Eve represent all the possible free beings, and that there are only four initial world-states compatible with the existence of free creatures. In that case, if TM were true, God would have absolute control over every free creature he could make, and the control would be exercised by “pushing” spatiotemporally distant “buttons”. So far, the CFs under consideration only give God voodoo control over the *initial* decisions of these creatures. But, given the possibility of enough tiny differences far away, there is the possibility of further initial world-types allowing for divine control over the outcomes of all circumstances of free choice that could possibly develop in worlds that begin with Adam and Eve.

What happens when we relax some of the absurd simplifications in this picture — for instance, the assumption that there are only four possible initial world-types compatible with free creatures (an assumption we had better relax, given the possibility of further choices which must be correlated with different “buttons”)? What is crucial about the four world-types in the toy “Adam-and-Eve” example, is that they differ only in tiny ways, and that these differences are not of major importance to God’s plans — so it costs God nothing to choose *A* rather than *A1*, *A2*, or *A3*, if *A* is required to insure that

Adam and Eve do as he wishes. One might worry that my claims about Adam and Eve cannot be generalized to cover all possible creatures. Consider free creatures that could be created in worlds with initial world-types that *preclude* all tiny, distant differences that do not matter to God. Would they be at least partially immune to God's control in *every* world?

Here is the sort of first family that might be thought to be immune, in some of the situations in which it could be created, from control by means of distant and irrelevant factors. Consider a first family consisting of two angels, each a simple substance, preceded by nothing whatsoever and accompanied by nothing whatsoever. As the pair of first created beings come into existence, they are given their choice of two songs to sing. There might seem to be a big difference between the initial world-type that precedes their creation (one might call it the "null-type", a past history consisting of nothing at all) and any initial world-type containing tiny, distant things that could be counterfactually relevant to the choices of the angels. And so one might conclude that, inevitably, the only kinds of "buttons" that might be available to control the angels' choice of songs would involve creating a radically different world — in which case it is harder to interpret the "pushing" of the "buttons" as tiny changes about which God would be indifferent.

I am suspicious of this line of defense, however. Even first families in a null-type world might well be subject to divine voodoo, if they are creatures that could have existed and been faced with the same kind of choice in a world where God first (or simultaneously) created a causally unrelated universe with its own contents. I suppose some space-time manifolds, though devoid of free creatures, are worth creating in their

own right, for aesthetic reasons. God seems to have seen value in the creation of a lifeless, immensely complicated, evolving universe — namely, our own, throughout the vast majority of its history. Among the perfectly good universes compatible with the angels as first family, then, I imagine that some contain earlier space-times filled with, for example, glowing, swirling gases — perhaps something like spiral nebulae, for example, some of which were apparently worth *actually* creating even though they have little if anything to do with free creatures (so far as we know!). The gaseous universe passes away, and has no effect on the angels. But the contents of this earlier universe could have been created in infinitely many distinct, equally lovely configurations, evolving according to one of infinitely many laws of development. Some such prior universes could be very small, differing only minutely from a world with the null-type beginning; others could be astonishingly complex. Given Molinism, the falsehood of LIMIT, and Plantinga-style recombination principles, the following combination of CFs is possible: Were the null-type world created, the angels would both choose song number one; were a gaseous world of one sort to have preceded them instead, they would have chosen song number two; were a slightly different sort of gaseous world to have preceded them, one would have chosen song one, the other song two; etc. In that case, even if God creates them in the null-type world, there are little differences in equally lovely worlds God could have created; and, in some possible worlds, the CFs with these alternative initial world histories in their antecedents give him complete control over the angels' choices. By deciding whether or not to create some other, aesthetically pleasing things, God decides what songs the angels will sing, and he is free to choose any possible combination he likes.

*Stage Two: Why Even the Possibility of Divine Voodoo Worlds is Problematic*

Stage one of my argument can be summed up as follows: The Molinist posits truths about what every possible free creature would do under every possible indeterministic circumstance of choice. On Molinistic principles, there must be some possible worlds in which little changes in trivial features of the distant past (or in causally unconnected regions) can be used by God to control the choices that would be made by his creatures. So there was a chance, however small (though perhaps no smaller than the chances of transworld depravity), that God have found himself confronted by essences each of which displays transworld manipulability. In that case, if he creates free creatures at all, then he creates creatures over which he has absolute voodoo-like control — control exercised by his determination of distant, relatively trivial details about inanimate parts of the universe.

Some of my best friends are Molinists; and many of them are prepared to accept everything for which I have argued so far: it is possible for distant differences to make a difference in CFs, and such CFs could have been combined in ways that would have given God absolute control over all possible creatures. But they see no problem in countenancing this — as an extremely unlikely possibility. The existence of CFs, and their use by God at the first stage in his providential planning of a world, does not render a person unfree, say these Molinists — and the true CFs would not do so, even in the unlikely event that they gave God voodoo-like powers over every possible free creature. So long as God is not able to pick and choose which CFs are true, we remain free, even if

the true CFs imply that we can be controlled by the pushing of buttons or twiddling of knobs far away in space and time.

But how could I still be free, if someone else possessed the means to determine the outcome of every possible kind of choice with which I might be confronted? (By “determine” I mean simply “decide what it will be” — a perfectly good sense of the term.) Perhaps if the person who possessed the means refused to make use of it, I might remain free; but that is not an option for God, if he creates someone who is transworld-manipulable. Consider the angels, whose choices are counterfactually linked to the prior presence or absence of various aesthetically pleasing patterns in a swirling cosmic dust. Even if God creates the angels in the null-type world, he does not fail to control their choice of song merely because he did not *actually* create the patterns that would have led to their choosing differently. “Not pushing any button” on a remote control can be a way of controlling the things with which the remote is counterfactually linked. Suppose that, if I were to push one button, the TV would turn off; if I were to push another, the TV would switch channels; but if I were to refrain from pushing buttons altogether, the TV would explode, killing everyone in the room. With the remote in my hand, and full knowledge of these conditionals, I cannot claim that deliberate refusal to push a button was a case of having control but not using it. Given God’s knowledge, in advance, of all the CFs about the angels, his choice of a null-type history must count as deliberate control of the angels’ choice of song, so long as alternative histories involving lovely patterns of dust were counterfactually linked to the total range of the angels’ choices.

Pursuit of the remote control analogy makes clear just how difficult it is to believe that transworld-manipulable creatures would be free. Which CFs are true is, according to

the Molinist, not up to God — they are “given” to God by...reality, or contingency, or “the way things just happen to be”. In every world, they provide God with something like a remote control device; that is how the Molinist explains God’s risk-free providential control. But in some worlds the device is nearly useless. It is as though there were a remote control manufacturer — an “independent contractor” over whom God has no authority, operating “before” God decides what to create — and the quality of the remote control produced by this manufacturer varies from one possible world to another. When God gets the manufacturer’s handbook (i.e., the list of true CFs), explaining what the buttons do, he may find that facts about parts of the physical world far from his free creatures would be relevant to controlling them, providentially. But he might also find that, no matter what the world is like beforehand, any free creature offered an apple, say, would accept it. The buttons that, in some worlds, control apple-choosings, have been disconnected. Similarly, in worlds where transworld depravity runs utterly rampant, it turns out that, no matter what buttons might be pushed before creatures face morally significant decisions, they would sin.

The chanciness of God’s being given a really good remote does not seem to me to be at all relevant to the degree of freedom possessed by the creatures he controls, once he has one in hand. Suppose a scientist (mad, as usual) makes a super-sophisticated humanoid robot, the behavior of which is designed to be somewhat indeterministic. She then makes a device that looks for all the world like a remote control. The remote is not hooked up to the robot by wires, or radio waves, or any known method of information transfer. It is also an indeterministic matter, at the time at which the remote is made, whether there will be any correlations between pushing buttons on the remote and the

behavior of the robot. But if she is really lucky, the device and the robot will “magically” link up, so that, despite the apparent indeterminacy within the robot (indeterminacy understood as latitude left by the laws of nature), she can get it to do whatever she wants among all the physically possible options open to it at any given time, just by pushing buttons on the remote. And, somehow, she knows (with certainty) whether such a link has been established; and she knows (with certainty) which combinations of button-pushings (and failures to push buttons) are correlated with which robotic actions (and failures to act). If she is lucky, she will have absolute control over the robot — even though there was nothing she could have done ahead of time to insure that she had such control. But, given that the counterfactual link has been established, she can decide exactly what to have the robot do, in every circumstance. To make the case even more like that of the divine voodoo in worlds where everyone suffers from transworld manipulability, another modification is needed: let us suppose that she has just one chance to make such a device. Only the first remote created in the proximity of a given robot has any chance of linking up with it in this way; if it fails, or only allows for partial control, that is the end of the story; there is no point in trying again.

The link between remote and robot in the story is not exactly causal — or, at least, it is as noncausal as God’s control of us by means of CFs. Pushing the buttons does not cause the robot’s motions, if “causing” means something like “bringing about by means of a transfer of energy”. Still, despite the absence of normal sorts of causal transactions between the remote and the robot, the mad scientist has complete “counterfactual control” over it. Not even completely refraining from pushing buttons will prevent her from exercising her control, given her knowledge of what the robot will do in every

circumstance. If she holds the remote in her hand, and knows what situation the robot is in, and decides not to press any buttons, she is just as thoroughly in control of what it does as when she pushes buttons.<sup>30</sup>

Adding more robots might limit the mad scientist's control in a way that parallels limitations God might face. Suppose that, if a single remote device were made in the vicinity of an army of robots, there would be a chance of its buttons controlling them all. If the pushing of combinations of buttons were counterfactually linked to each robot's behavior (perhaps different types of behavior would be exhibited by different robots were the scientist to push a certain series of buttons), then her ability to control the army might be very limited. Suppose, for example, that the robots are "Sentinels" (gigantic, mutant-hunting robots), and that she wants them to kill all mutants. Fortunately (from the perspective of the mutants), for any button she pushes that will set some of them to work hunting down mutants, it puts others to work protecting mutants. Still, if she is extremely lucky, and the device has enough combinations of buttons, the Sentinels could turn out to be completely under her control — for the remote might link up with the robots in such a way that, for every possible combination of actions the robots could take at a given time, she has available to her a way to push buttons that will guarantee that they perform that combination of actions. Then, if she wants them all to hunt mutants they will; and if the mutant-loving Dr. Xavier gets hold of the remote, he can insure that they only protect mutants. If the perverse members of the Hellfire club acquire the remote, they will no doubt decide to have the Sentinels do some combination of the two. But whoever controls the ideal remote has complete latitude in choosing what the robots will do; any possible combination of activities can be selected.

Suppose a remote has turned out perfectly, giving the possessor complete control over some creature's every decision and action; and suppose our mad scientist is holding the remote and staring at the creature, vividly aware of the precise ways in which the creature's behavior depends upon her pushing or refraining from pushing certain buttons. Could we possibly regard the subsequent actions of the creature as *freely chosen*? Can someone be under such complete control, and yet remain free?

One thing is certain: If *I* discovered that someone had this sort of control over my decisions, I would conclude that I was not a free agent. And I suspect that most people would have similar reactions. If we would be right to feel this way, what follows for Molinism? Granting the possibility of the CFs turning out in such a way that free creatures are impossible, the Molinist must admit that God *could* have found himself unable to create free creatures at all. The cost of this admission will be explored in the penultimate section. First, I shall try to justify my hypothetical reaction to the discovery that I am transworld manipulable.

### *Transworld Manipulability and Freedom*

Suppose, for concreteness, that, long ago, there was a patch of cosmic dust blowing around in a complex pattern; and that God's selection of a pattern for this dust enabled him to control every choice I could possibly make. Imagine a continuous space-time with precisely located dust particles; and suppose that the (literally) infinitely many precise ways the dust could swirl provide the means to insure that I pick any one of the range of options that would be open to me in any indeterministic situation I could encounter.

Learning that God used the dust to control my every choice would convince me I am not free. But suppose I reach this conclusion by tacitly reasoning as follows: The state of the dust, plus the CFs available to God before creation, would not be within my power to change; but, if the concrete past (also now beyond my power), plus these CFs, together entail that I do something, then I do not act freely. This argument is based on the same principles as van Inwagen’s “Consequence Argument”<sup>31</sup> — the *ur*-argument for incompatibilism, in the minds of many contemporary libertarians — and, if it works when the CFs deliver transworld manipulability, it ought to work when they yield transworld depravity, transworld sanctity, or some more mixed outcome.<sup>32</sup> If my hypothetical reaction (“I’m not free!”) to news of my transworld manipulability is only justified by the soundness of this argument, then the possibility of divine voodoo worlds is playing no special role — except to make vivid just how radically “up to God” it could be which alternatives are ruled out. Molinists generally respond to this sort of argument by claiming that, in the sense of “within my power” that is relevant to freedom, I *do* have power over the true CFs: Had I chosen otherwise, the CFs would have been different. I have a kind of “counterfactual control” over the CFs that renders them innocuous.<sup>33</sup>

But even granting the validity of the Molinists’ response (at least for the sake of argument), there seems to me to be something *more* going wrong when God exercises divine voodoo power over his creatures. Libertarians ought to think that more is required for a kind of freedom-worth-having than mere indeterminism in the process of choosing. One of these requirements is *not being completely under the control of another person*. Normally, one should have thought that the only ways to control another’s choices

involve ruling out alternative possibilities. But, if one accepts the Molinist scheme, that turns out to be false.

I tried to avoid overtly *causal* language in describing the counterfactual connections that give the mad scientist control over her creations, or God control over me by means of the dust. But could it be that the word “control” is already loading the deck against the Molinist? No. It should be clear, from the earlier discussion of the motivations for Molinism, that first-stage knowledge of CFs is important precisely because it seems necessary in order for God to exercise risk-free providential control over all of history. His inability to also determine what the CFs will be provides a bit of a buffer between God’s will and our choices; but it does not prevent him from controlling the course of events by means of his advance knowledge of what we will (and would) freely do. The connections between the mad scientist’s remote and the robot hold because of the same kinds of conditionals; if God’s providential arranging of things so that they turn out as he plans counts as a kind of control over history — and this Molinists are quick to affirm — then the scientist’s ability to choose what her creation will do amounts to complete control over its actions. And likewise for God’s ability to choose what I do by means of the swirling dust.

The less control I have over someone, the more autonomous the person is. Control, and autonomy, come in degrees. Suppose I suffer from extreme transworld *depravity*, rather than manipulability. In that case, so long as God has reason to allow me to exist at all, he cannot be held responsible for my choosing evil rather than good; my choosing evil is beyond his control. Likewise, if I am transworld sanctified, he gets no credit for not having created me in situations in which I would have chosen badly. In

either case, I display a kind of autonomy, relative to God's goals. If, however, I am transworld manipulable, I present God with no obstacles; he has absolute freedom to determine whether I choose good or evil in every possible situation. Since, by hypothesis, the CFs *in fact* allow God to control me by his disposition of the swirling dust, I am *in fact* under his control — even if the Molinist is right in supposing that I have the “counterfactual power” to make it the case that I *not* have been controllable by means of the dust. Since the CFs are *true*, I never in fact exercise this power, and so I remain under his control for my entire life. If someone else has the power to decide exactly what to have me do in every circumstance, then, even if I have counterfactual control over whether the person has this power, so long as I do not in fact rob him of this power, I am not free.

The Molinist response I have most often heard to my argument is simply to “stare me down” at this point. I can be under the complete control of another person — that is, I can place no limits upon his freedom to decide what I will decide — and yet I can be perfectly free (even in the libertarian's robust sense of the term, as opposed to some watered-down, compatibilistic surrogate for “free”). I am tempted to respond to this claim by alleging that being free analytically entails *not* being under the complete control of another. I do not see how to prove this. But I can at least prove that it is not the “ruling out of alternative possibilities in advance” that is driving my judgments about these cases. Consider the mad scientist again: suppose that the button-pressing by means of which she is able to control the actions of a robot or a living creature must occur at the exact same moment as the choice — the CFs that give the remote its power are of the form, “If such-and-such buttons were pressed at *t*, the creature would freely decide, at *t*,

to do so-and-so". The mad scientist can be an agent with libertarian freedom, undecided, right up until the moment of the choice, about what to have the robot or creature do. In that case, alternative possibilities are not ruled out in advance; but my reaction to the case is the same. If the remote affords her *complete* control — the ability to select any choice that is left open to the robot or creature by the laws of nature — then the robot or creature could not be free. Or so it seems to me.

*Could God Have Been Unable to Make Free Creatures?*

I can see a way for a Molinist to accept my two claims — that transworld manipulability is at least possible, and that a person so completely manipulable would not be free — while nevertheless insisting that, since not every essence has turned out to be transworld manipulable, God was able to create free creatures while knowing exactly what they would freely do under every possible circumstance. Freedom is built into CFs, as I have been using the term; they are conditionals about what choices would freely be taken by creatures in indeterministic circumstances. But for every CF of the form, "Were  $x$  in such-and-such (indeterministic) circumstances,  $x$  would *freely* do  $A$ ", there is a weaker conditional of indeterministic behavior, "Were  $x$  in such-and-such (indeterministic) circumstances,  $x$  would do  $A$ ". The Molinist might admit that, if all possible free creatures had turned out to be transworld-manipulable, then God would not have been able to create any of them *as free creatures*. (They still would be *possibly free*. Since their transworld manipulability is not essential to them, there are possible worlds in which they are not under God's complete control — that is, worlds in which the CFs that happen to be true do not give God a very powerful remote control device.) My

hypothetical Molinist objector says: Why should the Molinist care much about this distant possibility? What is important is that God know plenty of the weaker sort of conditionals, the ones describing what all possible creatures would do under indeterministic conditions. So long as he knows those kinds of conditionals, and they do not give him extreme manipulative powers, then he can create free creatures while knowing what everyone would do under all possible circumstances.

The Molinist who adopts this strategy would grant the possibility of transworld manipulability for every essence, while admitting its incompatibility with God's creating free creatures. Possible creatures that display extreme forms of transworld depravity or sanctity greatly limit God's options — e.g., creatures who, for every range of actions open to them, would always take the worst option *no matter what*, could not be controlled by fiddling with the conditions, distant or near, leading up to their choices. If God's knowledge of the CFs about me is compatible with my freedom (so long as they do not render me transworld manipulable), then I am extremely free in worlds where I turn out to be transworld depraved or sanctified, and less free to the extent that the CFs give God more control over my choices, providing him with better and better "remote controls". This response requires that freedom come in degrees; but that does not seem so hard to swallow.<sup>34</sup> Our Molinist can agree, then, that God *could* have found himself without the option to create free creatures; but also insist that this possibility was vanishingly small, and so not worth worrying about.<sup>35</sup> Molinism has an exotic possibility as a corollary; but this possibility is really no more exotic or surprising than transworld depravity or sanctity; once a Molinist has recognized these latter two possibilities, is the possibility of transworld manipulability really so hard to accept?<sup>36</sup>

There is a downside for the Molinist who would take this line. She must admit that God only contingently has the power to create genuinely free creatures. Accepting this conclusion strikes me as only marginally better than the first Molinist response I considered: i.e., simply “staring down” the stories about robots and control by cosmic dust, and claiming that the intentional use of a perfect remote control device is no threat to the freedom of the creatures it is used to control. Here is the challenge for the Molinist who would use the second strategy instead: Does she really want to say that God could have “woken up” to find that he has been given, by nobody in particular, a remote control device so powerful that, whatever he does, his possession of it prevents him from being able to create free creatures? Admitting that God could find himself in this depressing position may not violate the letter of omnipotence, once the notion is formulated with sufficient care.<sup>37</sup> Accepting this conclusion underscores the fact that the Molinist’s God, though he does not take risks, is nevertheless *subject to* risk. There was a chance that God’s desire to create free creatures would not be realizable. Fortunately, things seem not to have turned out that way; but they could have.<sup>38</sup>

## **V. Conclusion**

My own judgment is that neither response is plausible. Something has gone terribly wrong if one is forced to admit the possibility of divine voodoo worlds; and no one will be surprised to learn what I think it is: the supposition, dubious to begin with, that free creatures can be infallibly manipulated while remaining free – that they can be deliberately put in circumstances where they freely do something, even though the one who put them in those circumstances has, in advance, infallible knowledge of what they

will do. It is the hypothesis of the availability of CFs at the first stage in God's foreknowledge, together with the contingency of the CFs, that has generated the voodoo worlds in which we are too easy to control to be free.

Control by means of Molinist CFs might *seem* consistent with freedom, so long as we do not think about the case in which God would have absolute voodoo control — so long, that is, as we ignore possible worlds like the ones in which God is able to make each of us do any one of the range of choices open to us whenever we face a free decision, by means of a careful choice of a pattern for some swirling dust somewhere in the distant past. But a Molinistic theory of providence requires either conditionals of freedom, or at least conditionals of indeterministic behavior, that do, in some possible worlds, give God this sort of extreme voodoo control. So Molinism requires either the possibility of free action on the part of creatures who, it seems to me, could not really be free; or the possibility of God's being unable to create free creatures at all. Neither alternative is a happy one.

If, as Molinists sometimes allege,<sup>39</sup> their view provides the only way for a libertarian to consistently affirm that God has complete foreknowledge (or complete timeless knowledge) while exercising risk-free providential control; then libertarians should accept at least a part of the Open Theists' controversial package: namely, the thesis that God had to choose whether to create free creatures "before" knowing what they would do.

## **Appendix: CFs as Indicative Conditionals**

Could Molinists construe CFs as indicative conditionals, rather than counterfactuals or subjunctives? And, if they could, would it affect my argument?

The first question is complicated by the fact that philosophers of language differ radically in their views about the nature of indicative conditionals. As I see it, there are three deep faultlines separating rival theories of indicatives. (1) Some philosophers deny that the assertion of an indicative conditional is typically used to express a proposition; they say utterances of indicative conditionals are not the kinds of speech acts that can properly be evaluated for truth and falsity. (2) Others think indicatives are really material conditionals in disguise. (3) Still others provide truth-conditions that in one way or another incorporate facts about the speaker's epistemic situation. In this appendix, I provide a rough sketch of each approach to indicative conditionals. In each case, it appears that Molinists either could not construe CFs as indicatives, or at least could not do so in a way that would make a difference to the arguments in the body of the paper.

Ernest Adams has long argued that the point of indicative conditionals is to express — though not to *report* — a certain feature of one's own state of mind: namely, one's assigning a high probability to the consequent, given the truth of the antecedent. At least in the interesting cases, in which the antecedent is false, indicative conditionals are, he says, without a truth-value; they are more closely akin to speech acts like "That's disgusting!" Their primary job is the expression of a certain kind of mental state on the part of the speaker, generally with the intent to produce similar subjective states in others.<sup>40</sup>

Quite a few philosophers (e.g., Dorothy Edgington, Alan Gibbard, Jonathan Bennett, Richard Grandy, and Keith DeRose<sup>41</sup>) have developed theories of indicatives similar to Adams's in at least this respect: assertion of an indicative conditional does not express a distinctive kind of proposition, one that is a function of the propositions expressed by antecedent and consequent; instead, it is a qualified assertion of the consequent, or the expression of a distinctive sort of mental state (e.g., "conditional belief"). Suppose they are right, and that neither "Eve will not sin if tempted by a toad" nor "Eve will sin if tempted by a toad" expresses a truth. Still, there are states of mind worthy of the labels "knowing that Eve will not sin if tempted by a toad" and "knowing Eve will sin if tempted by a toad". And, if indicative conditionals are supposed to be the CFs God uses in his pre-creation deliberation, these states of mind must be able to play a role in practical reasoning. On none of these theories can one truly claim to know that Eve will sin if tempted by a toad, unless one assigns a high probability to her sinning, conditionally upon her being tempted by a toad. Furthermore, one could not know this with certainty, and use the knowledge in a completely risk-free way, unless (i) the probability assigned by the knower is one, and (ii) the probability really *is* one. So, if God could truly express his state of mind, prior to creation, by saying "Eve will freely sin if tempted by a toad", and if his knowing this conditional were supposed to give him risk-free providential control; then a theory of indicatives in this family requires that God also believe (and therefore know) that the probability of Eve's sinning, conditional upon toad-temptation, is one.

What theory of conditional probability could possibly allow for such absolutely certain and practically useful knowledge on God's part? Not a subjectivist theory (God's

knowledge of the conditional probability of Eve's sinning in these circumstances must be knowledge about the world, not about his own states of mind), nor a frequentist one (the event types need never occur). I suppose the best thing one could do, were one developing a theory of Molinistic knowledge along these lines, would be to posit brute, contingent, objective "propensities" that things can have with respect to indeterministic situations. Given the genuine indeterminacy involved, the propensities will be different in different possible worlds; and, to avoid divine determinism, it must not be up to God what they are. I believe that the arguments of this paper concerning subjunctive or counterfactual CFs could easily be transformed into arguments about contingent, objective propensities, so construed. In particular, an analogue of LIMIT would turn out to be just as plausible, and the rest of my argument for the possibility of transworld manipulability would go through.

Neither of the remaining two families of views about indicative conditionals — theories according to which they *do* express true or false propositions constructed, at least in part, out of propositions expressed by antecedent and consequent — will provide the Molinist with a way to resist my argument.

David Lewis, Frank Jackson, and H. P. Grice argue that indicatives are simple material conditionals — but expressed in words that "conversationally imply" much more, and thus tempt us to conclude, erroneously, that they are actually being used to assert these further things.<sup>42</sup> Suppose they are right. The material conditional "If p, then q" is equivalent to "Either not p, or q". One might be inclined to argue as follows, against a Molinist who tries to use material conditionals instead of subjunctives: "If Eve is tempted by a serpent, then she sins" is, on this view, equivalent to "Either Eve is not

tempted by a serpent, or she sins”, a disjunction with (let us suppose) a false first disjunct and a true second disjunct. When a simple truth-functional disjunction is true, but one disjunct is false, the truth of the disjunction as a whole is dependent upon the truth of the other disjunct. Since Eve was tempted by a serpent and sinned, the truth of the disjunction, and of the material conditional, is dependent upon the fact that Eve really did sin. In general, then, true material conditionals about circumstances of free choice that actually come about are dependent upon the truth of the consequent — they are true because of what the creature in fact does. Perhaps a material conditional describing what a certain creature actually does might follow from some other truth — a truth that does not imply that the creature actually acts in the way described, such as a subjunctive conditional. But if a true material conditional does not follow from a true proposition of this sort, then its truth depends upon the truth of the antecedent — i.e., it depends upon the fact that the creature exists and acts in this way. And if the Molinist identifies the CFs about Eve, say, with material conditionals because there are no true subjunctive or counterfactual conditionals describing what Eve would freely do or would freely have done in various circumstances; then there are no other truths, independent of the fact that Eve did sin, which could imply the material conditional “If Eve is tempted by a serpent, then she sins”. If what is true at the stages prior to God’s decision to create cannot depend upon truths implying that he creates, then the material conditional about Eve and the serpent is *not* true prior to God’s decision.

I recognize that this argument is not watertight. One might, for example, reasonably wonder whether the same notion of *dependence* is invoked in the two claims: true disjunctions with a false disjunct *depend upon* the truth of the remaining disjunct;

and truths at the stage before God has decided to create cannot *depend upon* things implying that he creates. But the more one thinks about the idea that CFs are mere material conditionals (and that similar subjunctive conditionals and counterfactuals are not also true and available to God at the first stage), the worse it seems. There are a great many trivially true material conditionals about the free choices of possible creatures. For every possible creature  $x$  and circumstances of free choice  $C$ , if  $x$  never exists or is never in fact put in those circumstances, then material conditionals of both these forms are true: if  $x$  is in  $C$ , then  $x$  freely does  $A$ ; and if  $x$  is in  $C$ ,  $x$  freely refrains from doing  $A$ . It could not be the case that *every* true material conditional of this form is available prior to God's decision to create anything at all. What is true at that stage is supposed to be independent of God's decision to create any particular creatures; but, assuming that what is available at the first stage is closed under entailment, these conditionals will imply that certain possible creatures will not be created. For example, both of these are true, and they together imply that my sister does not exist: "If my sister exists in any circumstances at all, then she will sin" and "If my sister exists in any circumstances at all, then she will not sin". Could some special subset of the material conditionals be available to God prior to his creative decisions? There would have to be enough CFs about me to enable God to know what will happen if he creates me, but not enough to imply that my merely possible sister will not exist. Which of the many material conditionals about my sister will God know, at the first stage?

I suppose a Molinist could imagine that a random assortment of the true CFs about my sister is somehow selected, and made available at the first stage; while, in my case, God knows the full spectrum of true material CFs about me. But there is something

very strange about this idea: that, in deciding whether to create my sister, God makes use of the fact that, if my sister were offered a bribe, she would freely take it, but does *not* make use of the fact that, if my sister were offered a bribe, she would not freely take it. After all, both are, by hypothesis, true; and true for the same reason, namely, the falsity of the antecedent. God's using just one of the two, in these circumstances, seems to me to put him in an absurd situation. It would be closely analogous to the following scenario. Suppose that, unbeknownst to me, there are neither subjunctive nor counterfactual truths about whether I would arrive at the airport on time, if I took the low road or the high road. (Perhaps quantum indeterminacy leaves it radically undetermined whether I arrive early or late, no matter which route I take.) Now suppose I am told, by some trusted authority, that the following material conditionals are true: If I take the low road, I will arrive late; and if I take the high road, I will arrive late. On the basis of this information, I decide to call the airline, tell them that I won't make the flight, and try to arrange for a later one. Would I feel cheated to learn that it was not true that, if I had taken the low road, I would have been late; nor was it true that, if I had taken the high road, I would have been late; and that the material conditionals I was fed by this authority were true in virtue of the falsity of their antecedents? You bet I would! But if God knows "randomly chosen" material conditionals about my (merely possible) sister, and they figure among his reasons for not creating her; and if there are no subjunctives or counterfactuals to "back them up"; then he will know, at the next stage, that he was making decisions upon precisely this sort of basis. He was tricked!

So I set aside, as a nonstarter, the hypothesis that CFs are equivalent to material conditionals. What other theories construe indicatives as true or false propositions, built,

in part, out of propositions associated with the antecedent and consequent? I know of none that is at all likely to deliver indicative conditionals fit to serve as the Molinist's CFs. The most plausible of such theories assume that there is an implicit subjectivity to indicatives, a relativization to what is known by the speaker or what can be taken for granted in the context of utterance. A plausible, rough-and-ready test of the acceptability of an indicative conditional, by me at a given time, is: Try adding certainty about the antecedent to the stock of other things I then believe, modifying my other beliefs, and the probabilities I assign them, "in the most natural, conservative manner"; and then "see whether what results from this includes a high probability for" the consequent.<sup>43</sup> One explanation for the fact that this "Ramsey Test" seems right would be: the proposition I express by an indicative conditional on a given occasion includes an implicit relativization to the set of other things I believe then. But there are more direct arguments.

Alan Gibbard drew attention to a kind of "standoff" in which well-informed observers accept conditionals that clash; and these situations make the subjectivity of indicatives particularly vivid. In one famous "Gibbardian Standoff" (modified slightly by Bennett<sup>44</sup>), Pete and Lora are the only two poker players left in the game; one observer sees Pete leave the room without the distressed look that always results from Pete's calling and losing; the other observer sees Lora leave the room with more money than she had earlier. The first quite properly concludes that, if Pete called, he won the last hand; the second equally reasonably concludes that, if Pete called, he lost the last hand. Neither observer is mistaken about any "matter of fact", or relying upon misleading evidence. Assuming that, in affirming such conditionals, the observers would express propositions,

there's no reason to say that one speaks truly and the other falsely; given the aptness of the conditionals, one should conclude that both are true. That would be okay, if indicatives were merely material conditionals; but on views that treat them as something more robust, such conflicts are not tolerated.<sup>45</sup> The salient difference between the people in a Standoff has to do with the differences in their evidence; so if both express true propositions, the difference in evidence must somehow work its way into the truth conditions for the conditional.

A relatively crude strategy for incorporating the speaker's evidence into the meanings of indicative conditionals would be to say that an utterance of such a conditional expresses a truth if and only if the antecedent, together with other things the speaker knows at the time, entails the consequent. Stalnaker's more sophisticated theory makes use of the kind of possible-worlds semantics that has shed considerable light on subjunctives and counterfactuals, effecting an attractive unification of the two kinds of conditionals. On Stalnaker's view, every context of thought and utterance includes a set of taken-for-granted assumptions about what the world is like, which can be represented by a set of possible worlds; and an indicative conditional is true just in case the nearest of these worlds in which the antecedent is true is also a world in which the consequent is true.<sup>46</sup>

In the case of an utterly lonely speaker (or thinker), the relevant set of worlds simply represents things properly-taken-for-granted by the speaker (or thinker), there being no conversation partners with whom she needs to negotiate to arrive at a common stock of reasonable assumptions. So, on a theory of indicatives like Stalnaker's, the stock of indicative conditionals God knows before deciding to create depends upon what other

things he knows at that stage. If the knowledge relevant to the truth of indicatives at the first stage were allowed to include everything God knows, then at the first stage God would know things that settle what sort of world he will create. Let  $p$  be a proposition describing the complete future of the world. If  $p$  is included as part of what can be taken for granted, then God would know the proposition he could express by the words: “If triangles have three sides, then  $p$  is true”. So, if there is to be a stage in God’s knowledge that includes an explanation of why he created anything, the indicatives included at that stage must be evaluated using much less of what God knows. With the first stage containing only things God knows that are independent of his choice to create, and no true counterfactuals or subjunctive conditionals about freely chosen actions (since the Molinist I am imagining is trying to get by with indicatives for CFs, instead), there will not be enough in the relevant set of taken-for-granted truths at that stage to determine the truth of indicative conditionals about what free creatures will do in various circumstances.

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<sup>1</sup> Among philosophical theologians based in the philosophy departments of Anglophone universities, Molinism may well be the most popular of five or six competing theories. For some defenses of Molinism, see Alvin Plantinga, "Replies to my Colleagues", *Alvin Plantinga*, ed. by James E. Tomberlin and Peter van Inwagen (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1985), 313-396; Jonathan Kvanvig *The Possibility of an All-Knowing God* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986); Richard Otte, "A Defense of Middle Knowledge", *International Journal Philosophy of Religion* 21 (1987): 161-69; Alfred J. Freddoso, "Introduction", in *Luis de Molina: On Divine Foreknowledge (Part IV of the Concordia)*, trans. by Freddoso (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), 1-81; Edward Wierenga, *The Nature of God* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989); and Thomas Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Robert Adams "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil", *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14 (1977): 109-117; and Adams, "An Anti-Molinist Argument", in *Philosophical Perspectives: Vol. 5*, ed. by James E. Tomberlin (Atascadero, Cal.: Ridgeview, 1991), 343-53; William Hasker *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989); Hasker, "A New Anti-Molinist

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Argument”, *Religious Studies* 35 (1999): 291-297; David Hunt, “Middle Knowledge: The ‘Foreknowledge Defense’”, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 28 (1990): 1-24; and Timothy O’Connor “The Impossibility of Middle Knowledge”, *Philosophical Studies* 66 (1992): 139-66.

<sup>3</sup> Flint responds to numerous versions of the “grounding objection” in *Divine Providence*, Chs. 5 and 6. Adams’s “An Anti-Molinist Argument” turns upon a transitive relation of “explanatory priority”. Flint argues that it is not obvious that the same relation is being invoked each time Adams appeals to explanatory priority; and that, if it is the same relation, it is not obviously transitive. Cf., Thomas Flint, “A New Anti-Molinist Argument”, *Religious Studies* 35 (1999): 299-305; and Flint *Divine Providence*, Ch. 7.

<sup>4</sup> For detailed defense of Open Theism on philosophical and theological grounds, see Hasker *God, Time, and Knowledge*; Clark Pinnock, et al. *The Openness of God* (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, 1994); David Basinger *The Case for Freewill Theism: A Philosophical Assessment* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996); John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998); and Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Another theological position that belongs to the same family as Open Theism is the slightly more radical thesis that, although there *is* a fact of the matter about what I will do, God does not know it ahead of time. Richard Swinburne and Peter van Inwagen hold this view because they believe that God could not know what I will do unless it were inevitable; and that the sort of inevitability that would be required for God to know it is incompatible with freedom. See Richard Swinburne *The Coherence of Theism*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 167-83; and Peter van Inwagen, “What Does an Omniscient Being Know About the Future?”, in Jonathan Kvanvig, ed., *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion: Vol. 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

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<sup>6</sup> My use of the masculine pronoun when referring to the deity is a sign of conservatism in matters of English style, not theology. It strikes me as absurd to use the feminine pronoun when referring to the undoubtedly male Jesus Christ; but, beyond that, I see no compelling *theological* argument (on general Christian principles) for the inevitability or importance of using only masculine pronouns when referring to God. Attributing masculinity to God is metaphorical at best; and the Hebrew and Christian scriptures use both feminine and masculine metaphors to describe God.

<sup>7</sup> Van Inwagen believes God may have left a great deal up to chance besides our free choices. See Peter van Inwagen “The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God”, in *Divine and Human Action*, ed. by Thomas Morris (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), 211-35.

<sup>8</sup> A large proportion of American Evangelical churches can trace their roots to Wesley via Pentecostalism or the Holiness Movement — all staunchly Arminian — but anecdotal evidence suggests that many leaders within these churches are attempting to steer their flocks away from Wesley and toward Calvin. The battles between Calvinistic and Arminian Baptists go back to the earliest days of their movement; but, today, the Baptists’ largest denominations and loudest voices side with Calvin. For a battlefield report, see Colin Hansen “Young, Restless, Reformed”, *Christianity Today*, September 2006, 32-38.

<sup>9</sup> Keith DeRose quoted me on this issue in a weblog, and at least one Calvinist scholar suggested this further gloss on my explanation.

<sup>10</sup> E.g., Flint, *Divine Providence*, Ch. 3.

<sup>11</sup> For a classic statement of such an argument, see Nelson Pike, “Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action”. *Philosophical Review*, 74 (1965): 27-46. For discussion of a modified version targeting timeless omniscience, see Plantinga, “On Okham’s Way Out”, *Faith and Philosophy* 3, (1986): 235-69;

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reprinted in John Martin Fischer (ed.), *God, Foreknowledge, and Freedom*, Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 178-215 (citations refer to Fischer)183-84.

<sup>12</sup> David Hunt uses “simple foreknowledge” for the conjunction of complete foreknowledge, libertarianism, and the thesis that one need not be a Molinist in order to believe the first two doctrines. But one needs a label for the stronger view, and “simple foreknowledge” has been used for this as well — e.g., in the introduction to *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, ed. by James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 10. For defense of simple foreknowledge, see David Hunt “Divine Providence and Simple Foreknowledge”, *Faith and Philosophy* 10 (1993): 389-414; Hunt, “A Reply to My Critics”, *Faith and Philosophy* 10 (1993): 428-38; and Hunt, “The Simple-Foreknowledge View”, in Beilby and Eddy, *Divine Foreknowledge*, 65-103. See also Bruce Reichenbach “God Limits His Power”, in *Predestination and Free Will*, ed. by David Basinger and Randall Basinger (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 101-124.

<sup>13</sup> Although David Hunt argues that a God with simple foreknowledge would have more providential control than one without, I do not think he would disagree with this claim. See Hunt, “Divine Providence and Simple Foreknowledge,” and “A Reply to my Critics”. My discussion of foreknowledge and “stages” has been much improved by Hunt’s insightful criticisms of earlier versions — though I fear he could still find things wrong with what I now say.

<sup>14</sup> Molinism acquired its other name (“the doctrine of middle knowledge”) from Molina’s contention that knowledge of (a) is, in the explanatory order of things, prior to knowledge of (b); and both (a) and (b) are explanatorily prior to God’s complete foreknowledge, leaving (b) in the “middle”. My more coarse-grained division ignores one of the distinctions in Molina’s three-stage picture; but one can see how natural it is for the Molinist to regard CFs as being sandwiched between knowledge of necessary truths and the complete foreknowledge acquired at what I am calling the “second stage”.

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<sup>15</sup> If, as I suspect, “singular truths” about individuals, including modal truths about them, depend for their existence upon the existence of the individuals that are their subject matter; then we should adopt a modal logic like A. N. Prior’s system Q; cf. Prior, *Time and Modality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), Ch. 5. In that case, what God knows, at stages before deciding to create anything, are purely general facts about what is possible for contingent individuals. And the Molinist should suppose that, for God to exercise risk-free providential control, he must know lots of CFs about the choices different person-types would freely take in various circumstances — with “person-type” understood as a qualitatively specifiable role. In some of his earliest work on the problem of evil, Plantinga develops a Molinist theory of CFs involving “possible persons” of this sort; see Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967), 140-49.

<sup>16</sup> One might imagine that God decided what his own CFs would be prior to his knowing the CFs about creatures; in which case, the stages in God’s knowledge would have to be ordered somewhat differently. (a), all by itself, would constitute the first stage; and, after a decision about which divine CFs should be true, the second stage would consist of (a) plus all CFs, both divine and creaturely; and complete foreknowledge would be inferable from this combination. (For discussion of this alternative, see Flint *Divine Providence*, pp. 55-65.) It is not clear that a Molinist picture of this sort would fully eliminate “risk-taking”, since God’s decision about the divine CFs is made without taking into account the facts about creaturely CFs; and when God does take them into account, his choice of a world follows automatically. “Before” knowing the creaturely CFs, or how the world would actually turn out, God made a decision; immediately, he knows the whole history of the world. In order to see whether this should be acceptable to someone of Molinist sympathies, one would have to undertake a close examination of the theological reasons to reject “risky” views of providence.

Could a Molinist suppose that CFs of divine freedom are not chosen at all, but simply known by God along with CFs about creatures? I think not; for then all God’s foreknowledge would collapse into a single stage, ruling out deep explanations for God’s creative decisions.

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<sup>17</sup> I thank Keith DeRose for this nice turn of phrase.

<sup>18</sup> For a statement of the Free Will Defense, under Molinist assumptions, see Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 7-64.

<sup>19</sup> See David Lewis, *Counterfactuals* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 26-28.

<sup>20</sup> See R. Gaskin, "Conditionals of Freedom and Middle Knowledge," *Philosophical Quarterly* 43 (1993): 414-416.

<sup>21</sup> Keith DeRose gives an account of counterfactuals and subjunctive conditionals that makes them more easily true than on many interpretations. If he is right, then relying upon them would not assure God of the kind of risk-free providential control the Molinist desires; so the Molinist should look elsewhere for conditionals to serve as CFs. See Keith DeRose, "The Conditionals of Deliberation", *Mind*, forthcoming  
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<sup>22</sup> For details, see Lewis, *Counterfactuals*; and Robert Stalnaker, "A Theory of Conditionals", in *Studies in Logical Theory, American Philosophical Quarterly*, Monograph 2, ed. by Nicholas Rescher (Oxford: Blackwell, 1968), 98-112.

<sup>23</sup> Exact sameness of laws is too much to require. In deterministic contexts, the worlds that seem most relevant to determining what would have happened are ones in which little miracles occurred in the recent past.

<sup>24</sup> Lewis would say that the conditional is simply false; Stalnaker that it is neither true nor false, but indeterminate in truth-value. For comparison of the views (and defenses of Lewis's judgment about such

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cases), see Lewis, *Counterfactuals*, pp. 77-83; and Jonathan Bennett, *A Philosophical Guide to Conditionals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 183-189.

<sup>25</sup> “Collapse theories” of quantum phenomena allow for a kind of action-at-a-distance; and, in general, it must be admitted that there is great controversy about the spatiotemporal boundaries of the conditions immediately causally relevant to certain events.

<sup>26</sup> Daniel Fogal has floated the idea that an epistemicist about the vagueness of ordinary language might be in a better position to affirm a version of LIMIT (personal communication). I am skeptical, but unable to pursue the idea here.

<sup>27</sup> See, e.g., Flint, *Divine Providence*, 47; and Freddoso, “Introduction”, 50.

<sup>28</sup> Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: at the Clarendon Press), 169-190.

<sup>29</sup> For an argument that, given certain assumptions about the number of possible free creatures, and the numbers of choices they could make, the probability of transworld depravity will be infinitesimal, see Josh Rasmussen, “On Creating Worlds Without Evil — Given Divine Counterfactual Knowledge”, *Religious Studies* 40 (2004): 457-70. If his arguments go through, then the possibility I call “divine voodoo” will be equally unlikely. This is less problematic for me than for many Free Will Defenders, however. I have no stake in whether **all possible free creatures are actually** transworld **manipulable; but some** users of Plantinga’s Free Will Defense (though not Plantinga himself) are committed to the actual transworld depravity of all possible free creatures, or at least the transworld depravity of any sizable group of them that could co-exist and exercise significant freedom.

<sup>30</sup> Alexander Pruss has suggested to me that, so long as the person holding the remote control does not *care* about the outcome, failure to push buttons need not count as control, even in the face of vivid knowledge of

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what would happen were one to push them and what would happen if one did not. But, even if this is true, it is irrelevant to the case of control over our free choices between good and evil options; God is supposed to care a great deal about such things.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Peter van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), Ch. 3.

<sup>32</sup> William Hasker has developed several impressive arguments along these lines. Quite different versions may be found in Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989); and Hasker, “A New Anti-Molinist Argument”, *Religious Studies* 35 (1999): 291-297.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Flint, “Another Anti Anti-Molinist Argument”.

<sup>34</sup> In correspondence and unpublished work, Daniel Fogal has pointed out to me that freedom’s coming in degrees in this way might be vulnerable to the following sort of argument: there would have to be a line between creatures too manipulable to be free *at all* and creatures very manipulable but still free *to some small extent*; but (one might suppose) it is implausible to suppose there is such a line; so either creatures are free no matter how manipulable, or they are not free at all (if Molinism is true). Fogal also suggests that the “no arbitrary cut-offs” principle at work in this argument is close to the kind of reasoning I make use of in defense of LIMIT; and so, if I accept the one I should accept the other. I do not think the two appeals to “no arbitrary cut-offs” stand or fall together, but will set this interesting question aside here.

<sup>35</sup> The Molinist could also use Rasmussen’s reasoning (in “On Creating Worlds Without Evil”) to defend the idea that there is zero probability that we are in a divine voodoo world, and argue that this renders its bare possibility innocuous.

<sup>36</sup> Daniel Fogal, Sam Newlands, Mike Rea, David Hunt, and others have pressed me on this point.

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<sup>37</sup> As in, for example, Thomas Flint and Alfred J. Freddoso, “Maximal Power”, in *The Existence and Nature of God* ed. by Freddoso (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 81-113.

<sup>38</sup> It has been pointed out to me that Molinists might already be forced to admit that God could find himself in this situation; for it is tempting to say that, if every possible free creature were afflicted by extreme transworld depravity, a God who could do no wrong would not be able to create any of them.

<sup>39</sup> E.g., Flint, *Divine Providence*, Ch. 3.

<sup>40</sup> E. W. Adams, *The Logic of Conditionals* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1975).

<sup>41</sup> Dorothy Edgington, “On Conditionals”, *Mind* 104 (1995): 235-329; Allan Gibbard, “Two Recent Theories of Conditionals”, in *Ifs*, ed. by W. Harper, G. Pearce, and R. Stalnaker (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1981); Bennett, *A Philosophical Guide*; Keith DeRose and Richard Grandy, “Conditional Assertions and ‘Biscuit’ Conditionals”, *Noûs* 33 (1999): 405-20.

<sup>42</sup> Lewis, *Counterfactuals*; Frank Jackson, “On Assertion and Indicative Conditionals”, *Philosophical Review* 88 (1979): 565-89; H. P. Grice, *Studies in the Way of Words* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).

<sup>43</sup> This is Bennett’s formulation of the “Ramsey Test”; see Bennett, *A Philosophical Guide*, p. 29.

<sup>43</sup> See Bennett, *A Philosophical Guide*, pp. 83-93.

<sup>43</sup> For discussion of this point, see Bennett, *A Philosophical Guide*, p. 84.

<sup>43</sup> Robert Stalnaker, “Indicative Conditionals”, *Philosophia* 5 (1975): 269-86.

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<sup>44</sup> Bennett, *A Philosophical Guide*, 83-93.

<sup>45</sup> For discussion of this point, see Bennett , *A Philosophical Guide*, p. 84.

<sup>46</sup> Stalnaker, “Indicative Conditionals”.