

Metaphysics and God

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8 More on Molinism

John Martin Fischer

In this relatively brief chapter, I wish to clarify and perhaps to consolidate my views on the role of Molinism in understanding God's Providence and the relationship between God's omniscience and human freedom.¹ In the first part of the chapter I shall summarize the views I have sought to present elsewhere, attempting to situate Molinism in its intellectual home and highlighting the main features of my position. I then turn to an interesting challenge presented by Thomas Flint; in addressing Flint's worries, I hope to help us to gain a clearer understanding of the role—and limitations—of Molinism.

MOLINISM AND ITS ROLE

Here I shall take "Molinism" to be a position that is based on the writings of Luis de Molina, but I do not make the claim that they are Molina's views exactly; nor do I suppose that they are Molina's *only* relevant views. My aim here is not to do history of philosophy or textual exegesis, but, rather, to lay out and philosophically evaluate a certain set of views.²

Molinism presupposes that for an act to be free (and thus for the relevant agent to be morally responsible for it), the agent must be free to do otherwise, and, further, that the act must not be causally determined by prior events. Thus, the Molinist holds that the freedom relevant to moral responsibility is "freedom to choose/do otherwise," and that such freedom is incompatible with causal determinism. Additionally, the Molinist posits what might be called three (logical, not necessarily chronological) "moments" in God's knowledge: (i) His prevolitional (i.e., prior to God's willing to actualize any particular possible world) "natural knowledge" of metaphysically necessary states of affairs, including the capacities of all possible free creatures, (ii) His prevolitional "middle knowledge" of conditional future contingents (including knowledge of what creatures would *freely* do in all possible circumstances), and (iii) His "free knowledge" of the total causal contribution He himself wills to make to the created world plus what He knows via natural and middle knowledge.³

The Molinist is an incompatibilist about causal determinism and human freedom (in the relevant sense), but a compatibilist about God's omniscience (foreknowledge) and such freedom. (Molinism and Ockhamism share this particular dialectical niche.) The Molinist thus disagrees with both the compatibilist about causal determinism and human freedom to do otherwise (the "Multiple-Pasts Compatibilists" and the "Local-Miracle Compatibilists") and also the Theological Fatalists.

Molinism, with its doctrine of Middle Knowledge, provides an elegant model of Divine Providence. If we posit Simple Foreknowledge—that God knows in advance unconditional future contingent statements that state that some individual will freely perform some action in the future—it appears as if God is severely limited in his providential powers; after all, the future free behavior of human agents is "given to Him," as it were.⁴ But on the doctrine of Middle Knowledge, God can employ the relevant conditionals and his Natural Knowledge (of initial conditions) in the process of deciding which possible world to actualize. Molinism, as opposed to Simple Foreknowledge, provides a model of Divine Providence; as such, it is an important view both philosophically and theologically.

But some have evidently thought that Molinism's role includes more than providing a model of Divine Providence. More specifically, some philosophers have thought that Molinism stands on a par with the major answers to the problem of theological fatalism; that is, they have thought that Molinism somehow provides a distinctive answer to the basic argument for the incompatibility of God's omniscience and human freedom.⁵ The main point I have made in previous work on Molinism is that whereas Molinism does indeed provide a model of Divine Providence, it does *not* provide a distinctive view about the relationship between God's omniscience and human freedom.⁶ More specifically, my view is that it does not in any way provide a distinctive way of responding to the fundamental argument for the incompatibility of God's foreknowledge and human freedom.

To help to see this point, I shall offer a simple and streamlined version of what I take to be the challenge posed by the theological fatalist (the incompatibilist about God's omniscience and human freedom in the sense of freedom to choose/do otherwise).⁷ First, I assume here that "God" is a name that picks out an essentially sempiternal and omniscient individual. Whatever else omniscience involves, it entails that an omniscient agent believes that *P* just in case *P* is true. I now formulate a principle designed to capture the intuitive idea of the fixity of the past:

(FP) An agent *S* has it in his power (in the sense relevant to moral responsibility) to do *X* only if it is possible that *X* be an extension of the past (relative to *S*'s situation).

(FP) seeks to crystallize a basic and intuitive idea, but it is a bit vague. The notion of "possibility" in question must be thought of as something like

“compatibility with the logical truths and truths about essences,” or something like that; in any case, it is not the *same* notion of possibility as free-will possibility (“having it in one’s power”). Here is a slightly more explicit formulation, which employs the “possible-worlds” apparatus:

(FP*) An agent *S* has it in his power (in the sense relevant to moral responsibility) at (or just prior to) *t* to do *X* at *t* only if there is a possible world with the same past up to *t* in which *S* does *X* at *t*.⁸

Now the argument for incompatibilism can be presented. Suppose that God (as envisaged at least in part as stated previously) exists, and that *S* does *X* at *t*₂, where *X* is some ordinary act such as raising one’s hand. It follows that God believed at *t*₁ that *S* would do *X* at *t*₂. Given God’s essential omniscience, God’s belief at *t*₁ entails that *S* does *X* at *t*₂. Thus, in all possible worlds in which God believes at *t*₁ that *S* will do *X* at *t*₂, *S* will do *X* at *t*₂; so in any world in which *S* does not do *X* at *t*₂, God doesn’t believe at *t*₁ that *S* does *X* at *t*₂. It seems to follow from (FP*) that *S* does not have it in his power at or just prior to *t*₂ to refrain from *X*-ing at *t*₂, and thus that *S*’s doing *X* at *t*₂ isn’t free.⁹

Call this the Basic Argument for the Incompatibility of God’s Omniscience and Human Freedom (or the “Basic Argument,” for short). There are various ways to respond to the Basic Argument (in addition to simply accepting it as sound). Open Theism comes in various forms, but the Open Theists unite in denying that it follows from *S*’s doing *X* at *t*₂ that God believed at *t*₁ that *S* would do *X* at *t*₂. Perhaps the Open Theist will follow Arthur Prior in deeming such statements as “*S* will do *X* at *t*₂” as false at *t*₁.¹⁰ Or an Open Theist might follow Aristotle (on some interpretations of Aristotle) in saying that such statements as “*S* will do *X* at *t*₂” are neither true nor false—but are instead indeterminate in truth value—prior to (say) *t*₂. Alternatively, an Open Theist might argue that God chooses not to believe (or perhaps *cannot* believe) the propositions expressed by such statements as “*S* will do *X* at *t*₂” because believing such propositions would rule out human freedom, and He had to create free creatures (given His nature).¹¹

The Atemporalist will also deny the implication from *S*’s doing *X* at *t*₂ to God’s believing at *t*₁ that *S* would do *X* at *t*₂, but for a different reason. The Atemporalist contends that God is outside time—on this picture, God’s eternity is not sempiternality, but atemporality. Thus, although God timelessly knows and thus perhaps timelessly believes that *S* does *X* at *t*₂, He does not hold such a belief at any particular time. This view is associated with Boethius and Aquinas.

In contrast, an Ockhamist will accept the implication denied by the Open Theist and the Atemporalist, but go on to deny that (FP*) applies to *all* features of the past. The Ockhamist will say that (FP*) only applies to the temporally nonrelational or “hard” features of the past, and further

that God's beliefs are not such features. For instance, an Ockhamist might contend that "God believes at t_1 that S will do X at t_2 " expresses a temporally relational or "soft" fact about the past, which is thus not fixed at subsequent times (at least, not fixed in virtue of an application of [FP*]).¹² In contrast to the Ockhamist, the "Multiple-Pasts Compatibilist" contends that God's beliefs may well be temporally nonrelational or hard facts about the past, but such a theorist denies that even hard facts need be fixed at subsequent times—and thus the Multiple-Pasts Compatibilist denies (FP*^{*}).¹³

The foregoing simply indicates in a sketchy way—without suitable elaboration—the kinds of responses to the Basic Argument that are available. And, no doubt, there are more responses than I have mentioned. But what should be evident is that each of the responses takes the Basic Argument seriously and seeks to pinpoint a place—an assumption or premise, an inference—to be resisted. My contention is that Molinism does not provide such a response; more precisely, my claim is that Molinism in itself does not provide a *distinctive* response to the Basic Argument. Thus, I think that Molinism is not on a par with Open Theism, Atemporalism, Ockhamism, and Multiple-Pasts Compatibilism in providing a *response* to the Basic Argument. As I stated previously, Molinism is a model of Divine Providence, not a response to the Basic Argument; perhaps it presupposes such a response, but it is not itself a response to the Basic Argument.

MOLINISM IS NOT A RESPONSE TO THE BASIC ARGUMENT

To explain.¹⁴ On Molina's theory of middle knowledge, God is said to know in advance a large set of conditionals of the form, "If in circumstance C_1 , agent A would freely do X ," "If in circumstance C_2 , agent A would freely do Y ," and so forth. Given Molina's assumption about the relationship between acting freely and freedom to do otherwise, truths of the form, "In circumstance C_1 , agent A would be free to do other than he actually does (X)," "In circumstance C_2 agent A is free to do other than what he actually does (Y)," and so forth are simply assumed to be knowable by God prior to the relevant times (the times of the actions).

It should be clear that in the dialectical context (in which the incompatibilist's Basic Argument is under consideration), it would be question-begging (or at least not dialectically helpful at all) simply to bring forward (without explanation) the claim that God does know in advance truths of the form, "At some future time agent A will be free to do other than he actually does (X)." This simply posits that in the actual world God knows in advance that some human agent will in fact be free to do otherwise; but this is precisely what is called into question by the Basic Argument. I

contend that it would be *similarly* question-begging (or at least not dialectically helpful at all) to claim that God can know in advance truths of the form, “If agent *A* were in (possible) circumstance *C1*, *A* would be free to do other than he actually does (*X*).”

Note that God is assumed by the Molinist to know (via His natural knowledge) that (say) *C1* is possible. So God knows that there is a possible world in which *C1* obtains. Since (according to the Molinist) He also knows (via His middle knowledge) the conditional, “If agent *A* were in (possible) circumstance *C1*, *A* would be free to do other than he actually does (*X*),” it follows that God knows that there is a possible world in which *A* is free to do other than he actually does. (Obviously, God’s knowledge is closed under known implication.) Molinism here simply *posits* that it is possible that God knows in advance that a human agent is free to do otherwise. But the incompatibilist’s argument putatively establishes that God’s foreknowledge is *incompatible* with human freedom to do otherwise—and thus that it is *impossible*—there is *no* possible world—in which God knows in advance that some human agent is free to do otherwise.

So it appears that the Molinist is committed to a set of propositions that presupposes that the Basic Argument is unsound. I have contended that the mere assertion of those propositions does not in itself provide a helpful *response* to the Basic Argument. Now of course if Molinism were to accept the Ockhamist’s claim that God’s beliefs are temporally relational (hard) facts about the relevant times and thus not fixed at subsequent times, then it would have a response to the Basic Argument; but then the response would simply be Ockhamism! That is, Molinism would not in that case be a *distinctive* response to the Basic Argument; rather, it would be a model of Divine Providence that presupposes a *quite separate* response to the foreknowledge problem posed by the Basic Argument.

Note that if a Molinist embraces Ockhamism as a solution to the foreknowledge problem, this in no way vitiates its elegant and important contribution to understanding Divine Providence. It thus does not diminish the theological or philosophical importance of Molinism. My point is not that a Molinism that presupposes Ockhamism is untenable or insignificant; rather, it is that we need to understand precisely what Molinism’s role would be. Here what is doing *all* of the work in addressing the Basic Argument is Ockhamism; Molinism then comes into play as a model of Divine Providence, but *not* an answer to the incompatibilist’s challenge (as captured by the Basic Argument).

Note, additionally, that a Molinist (as understood previously) apparently *cannot* adopt Multiple-Pasts Compatibilism as a response to the Basic Argument. This is because the Molinist is an *incompatibilist* about causal determinism and the relevant sort of freedom (freedom to choose/do otherwise). A Multiple-Pasts Compatibilist is willing to concede that God’s beliefs are temporally nonrelational (hard) facts about the relevant

times, but he goes on to state that they are nevertheless *not* fixed at subsequent times. But such a move opens the door to compatibilism about causal determinism and the relevant sort of freedom. Indeed, it is difficult for me to see how one could be a Multiple-Pasts Compatibilist about God's foreknowledge and human freedom, but not about causal determinism and human freedom. I shall return to a more detailed and careful discussion of this possibility below.

Now if we prescind from the commitment to incompatibilism about causal determinism and human freedom (of the relevant sort), the Molinist could adopt Multiple-Pasts Compatibilism. But in this case nothing in the distinctive doctrines of Molinism—in particular, nothing about the counterfactuals of freedom that constitute Middle Knowledge—would help to justify or explain this response to the Basic Argument. There are philosophers who have defended Multiple-Pasts Compatibilism, but nothing in Molinism helps in this defense.

Now someone might say that he has good reasons (perhaps stemming from considerations pertinent to God's Providence) to adopt Molinism, and he adopts Molinism with the assumption that there is *some* suitable response to the Basic Argument. Perhaps such a person simply does not think the Basic Argument is compelling or provides a genuine challenge, or perhaps he does take the Basic Argument seriously, but puts it aside for the time being and simply assumes that there must be *some* adequate response. After all, this seems fair—we can't solve all interesting philosophical problems at once! (Indeed, it sometimes seems as if it would be miraculous if we could solve just *one*!)

There is absolutely nothing objectionable here, but it is (again) important to see that Molinism is *not* doing *any* work in replying to the Basic Argument. I am not claiming that anyone who adopts Molinism *needs* to address the Basic Argument, or, more generally, that anyone who holds any theological doctrines that are relevant to free will (or even that presuppose certain views about free will) must address the Basic Argument. It is quite all right simply to put the Basic Argument aside, perhaps for a rainy day. But then one should be willing to admit that this is what is happening—that Molinism is playing no role in addressing the Basic Argument and thus that Molinism is not on a par in this regard with (say) Ockhamism (or Aristotelianism or Open Theism). I wish to emphasize that I do not in any way want to “demote” or denigrate Molinism; I simply want to identify its niche more precisely in dialectical space.

FLINT'S CRITIQUE

I turn to a challenging critique of my position offered by Thomas Flint.¹⁵ In order to lay out Flint's critique, I need to introduce a bit of technical apparatus. Consider the conditional, “If agent *A* were in (possible) circumstance

$C1$, then A would be free to do other than he does (X).” Let’s symbolize such a conditional as “If $C1$, then (X and $P\sim X$),” where “ $P\sim X$ ” is to be read as “ A has the power to do (is free to do) other than X .” Also, “ $\text{Pos}(R)$ ” is to be read as “It is possible that R .”

Now my argument against construing Molinism as providing a response to the Basic Argument can be laid out as follows. The Molinist is committed to thinking that God, by His natural knowledge, knows that $\text{Pos}(C1)$. If the Molinist also can, in this dialectical context, assume that God knows the relevant conditionals, then God would by His middle knowledge know “If $C1$, then (X and $P\sim X$).” From these two bits of knowledge, it would follow that God knows that it is possible that A is free to do other than he does; in other words, it would follow that God knows that there is a possible world in which A is free to do other than what he does in that world. But this is dialectically unfair, since the ingredients in the incompatibilist’s argument (the Basic Argument) appear to imply that God’s foreknowledge is *incompatible* with human freedom, and thus that there is *no* possible world in which some human agent is free in the relevant sense.

Flint asks us to consider my argument, as sketched earlier. Slightly more explicitly, I claim that the two premises

(1) God knows that $\text{Pos}(C1)$

and

(2) God knows that (If $C1$, then [X and $P\sim X$])

imply the conclusion

(3) God knows that $\text{Pos}(X$ and $P\sim X)$,

which I claim to be dialectically inappropriate in the context of evaluating the Basic Argument. Flint’s first worry is that what (3) claims that God knows is, if true at all, a necessary truth (assuming something like an S5 system of modal logic), and hence something that God would know by His Natural Knowledge, not his Middle Knowledge. Since “ $\text{Pos}(X$ and $P\sim X)$ ” is necessary, it is known by Natural Knowledge, *not* Middle Knowledge.

Given that what (3) attributes to God as knowledge is a necessary truth, Flint finds it “very odd” that one who affirms (3) would be guilty of begging the question or some similarly suspicious dialectical behavior. Flint points out that even anti-Molinists such as William Hasker would presumably accept (3), and thus it would be wrong to suppose that the affirmation of (3) would in itself be dialectically unfair to the incompatibilist.

This point leads to another of Flint’s reservations. Flint says:

[Fischer's] argument suggests that it follows from (3) that

- (4) Pos(God knows in advance that a human agent is free to do otherwise).

Now for (4) to be “dialectically unfair” from an incompatibilist point of view, it would have to be seen as elliptical for the claim that God can know temporally beforehand *both* that a human agent will in fact act in one way *and* that the agent will be free to act in some other way—i.e., something along the lines of

- (4*) Pos(God knows in advance that [X & P~X]).

But there's good reason to think that (4*) doesn't follow from (3). Note first of all that many of [Fischer's] fellow incompatibilists (e.g., again, Hasker) would defend (3) but reject (4*). More importantly, their position seems fully consistent. (3) really just says that God knows that there are possible worlds in which people do things but could have done other things. (4*) says that there are possible worlds in which God knows temporally beforehand which of two available options a certain free human will choose. There simply is no obvious inconsistency in affirming the former but denying the latter.¹⁶

REPLY TO FLINT

I am very grateful for the thoughtful and penetrating critique by Flint, and I hope that my reply will help to clarify not just our disagreement, but the nature of my views about the role and dialectical niche of Molinism. First, if what is claimed to be known by God by (3), “Pos(X and P~X),” is indeed necessary, then, according to the Molinist, it is known via God's Natural Knowledge. Flint contends that it therefore cannot be known via Middle Knowledge. I argued earlier that it can in fact be known via what can be known through Middle Knowledge, Natural Knowledge, and the closure of (God's) knowledge under known implication. It would seem that propositions could be knowable by God via different channels, and that the proposition in question, “Pos(X and P~X),” would be just such a proposition. But let us simply stipulate here, for the sake of the discussion, that on Molina's view, God would know that Pos(X and P~X) via Natural Knowledge, if He knows such a proposition at all.

Now of course the problem is that to suppose that Pos(X and P~X) is part of God's Natural Knowledge might appear to beg the question against the proponent of the Basic Argument. At least it should be clear that to suppose that God can know such a proposition via *any channel*, including Natural Knowledge, is going to be highly contentious within the context of a consideration of the Basic Argument. Further, it is evident that to make this sort of supposition is not to provide a response to the Basic Argument in the sense of Open Theism, Atemporalism, or Ockhamism; all of these

approaches pinpoint some premise in the argument that they find problematic, and they explain why they reject the relevant premises. In contrast, to suppose the God can know a proposition such as “Pos(X and $P\sim X$)” in *any* way appears simply to deny the conclusion of the Basic Argument without explanation. So even if Flint is correct that the proposition in question would be part of God’s Natural Knowledge, it does not follow that it would be fair to require a proponent of the Basic Argument to accept that God could have Natural Knowledge, so construed. The problem gets pushed back, so to speak, to Natural Knowledge.

But what exactly is the problem? I agree with Flint that Hasker and in general the Open Theist would accept (3). This is because Hasker (or the Open Theist in general) does not accept the total package of ancillary assumptions that are in fact accepted by the Molinist. Specifically, the Molinist accepts a picture that includes first that in advance of creating any specific world, God knows that possibly $C1$. Further, on the Molinist picture, God can use information such as this on the basis of which He decides to actualize a particular possible world. Suppose that God decides to actualize the world according to which $C1$ is true. Now God is “inside” that world, so to speak, and given that He knows that $C1$ and He knows that (If $C1$, then (X and $P\sim X$)), He knows (in advance) that X and $P\sim X$. So there is a possible world in which God knows in advance that X and $P\sim X$.

So given the Molinist’s picture—the total package of Molinist views—one can get from (3) to (4*). That is, one can, as it were, push God’s knowledge inside the scope of the possibility operator by noting that on Molinism, God decided (say) to actualize the world according to which $C1$. (It might well be that God decided to actualize the world according to which $C1$ precisely in order to actualize a world according to which X and $P\sim X$.) It is as if you are deciding which movie to watch, and you have already seen all of them. You know that if you watch this one, such and such will happen, and if you watch that one, something else will happen, and so on. Then you choose this one. It seems to follow that you now—once you’ve chosen the movie—know what will happen.¹⁷

Hasker and other Open Theists do not accept elements of this picture, and thus they can accept (3) without thereby being committed to (4*). For example, Hasker does not accept that prior to actualizing a particular world, God could have both Natural Knowledge of initial circumstances and Middle Knowledge of the relevant conditionals (so-called “counterfactuals of freedom”). Given that Hasker does not accept this Molinist apparatus, he can accept (3) without thereby accepting (4*). But the Molinist cannot accept (3) without also accepting (4*), which is dialectically problematic within the context of an evaluation of the Basic Argument.

I suppose one could resist my argument by imagining that once God actualizes a particular possible world, He no longer knows that $C1$ will obtain. But then this collapses into a version of Open Theism. Or perhaps one could say that once God actualizes a particular possible world, He somehow “forgets” that if $C1$, then X and $P\sim X$. But this is highly implausible,

if it is even consistent with His omniscience. So, given that He knows the antecedent and the conditional, it follows via Modus Ponens that He knows the problematic consequent.

BERGMANN'S CRITIQUE

Earlier I stated that it is difficult to see how someone could adopt Multiple-Pasts Compatibilism about God's foreknowledge and human freedom (in the relevant sense) and yet maintain incompatibilism about causal determinism and such freedom; as I put it, Multiple-Pasts Compatibilism, with its signature contention that even indisputably "hard" or temporally nonrelational (as regards the future) facts need not be fixed or out of our control subsequently, "opens the door" to compatibilism about causal determinism and human freedom.

In very helpful and insightful correspondence, Michael Bergmann has suggested a way of defending Multiple-Pasts Compatibilism about God's foreknowledge and human freedom but *not* compatibilism about causal determinism and such freedom. Bergman says:

Consider these three kinds of facts about the past: past facts about future contingents, past facts about God's beliefs in future contingents, and past facts about events that causally determine my acts. It's very common to think I've got counterfactual control over past facts (a billion years ago) about future contingents (e.g., *p* will be true in 2007): even if I render *p* true in 2007, I am able now in 2007 to do otherwise; and if I did do otherwise, I would thereby be doing something such that if I did it, a billion years ago it was the case that *p* will *not* be true in 2007. In short, it's common to think I've got counterfactual power over past future contingents—I could do something such that they'd always be otherwise. Notice what's going on in that case:

- (i) That past fact about a future contingent is explained by my current actions, not vice versa. That past fact is what it is *because* of what I do now, not vice versa.

Now the same thing is true about God's past beliefs about future contingents:

- (ii) God's beliefs in future contingents are what they are *because* the past future contingents truths are what they are and (by the transitivity of 'because') *because* of what I'm doing now, not vice versa.¹⁸

(It's because God's beliefs are knowledge that we think he holds them *because* their contents are true.) But things are different when it comes to past facts that causally determine my acts:

- (iii) It's *not* the case that that past fact, which causes my current acts, is what it is *because* of my current act. Instead, it's the other way around: given that that past fact causally determines my current act, my current act is what it is *because* of that past fact.

And now we can see why it's [acceptable] to think I have counterfactual control over my some past facts and not others: I have counterfactual control over past facts so long as those past facts are what they are *because* of what I now do (and not vice versa). And it turns out that past facts about future contingents and past facts about God's beliefs *are* true because of what I do now. And it turns out that past facts about events that causally determine my current acts are not what they are because of what I do now; rather, I do what I do now because of those past facts. So the Foreknowledge/Freedom compatibilist has a principled reason for denying the fully general Fixity of the Past Principle (thereby avoiding the argument for Foreknowledge/Freedom incompatibilism) while at the same time allowing a Fixity of the Past Principle which denies counterfactual power over past facts which cause our acts (thereby defending the Consequence Argument for Determinism/Freedom incompatibilism against Altered-Past compatibilists who reject the Fixity of the Past by claiming to have counterfactual power over the past).¹⁹

Bergmann's suggestion is both ingenious and illuminating. Let's call past facts that depend on our present behavior "dependent," and those that do not so depend, "independent." His suggestion is that one can have a restricted Fixity of the Past Principle—a principle restricted to the independent facts. But whereas this is formally an open possibility, it seems highly implausible. More carefully, the restriction seems highly implausible if one takes seriously the idea that those past facts that are temporally nonrelational (as regards subsequent times) are "over-and-done-with" and *thus* fixed at subsequent times. The problem for the view that invokes a restricted Fixity of the Past Principle is that *all* temporally nonrelational facts—all "hard facts"—are over-and-done with, and thus *all* such facts should be considered fixed, if fixity stems from "over-and-done-with-ness." So it would be completely *ad hoc* to restrict the Fixity of the Past Principle to dependent facts.

This suggests that a theorist who wishes to apply a restricted Fixity of the Past Principle in the context of the debate about God's foreknowledge must *not* accept that fixity stems from over-and-done-with-ness. Rather, the view would be that fixity flows simply from pastness plus independence. This would leave the door open to be a compatibilist about God's foreknowledge and human freedom while being an incompatibilist about causal determinism and human freedom (of the relevant sort).

Note, however, that this view depends on an insistence that the relevant notion of "because of" must be asymmetric. Recall Bergmann's

statement, “. . . it turns out that past facts about events that causally determine my current acts are not what they are because of what I do now; rather, I do what I do now because of those past facts.” But on some views of the relevant counterfactuals, if causal determinism is true and I actually perform some action *X*, the following “backtracker” is true: “If I were to refrain from *X*, the past would have been different all the way back.” Thus, on this sort of view of the counterfactuals, there would indeed be a counterfactual dependence of the past causal facts on the behavior in question, so it would not be obvious that the relevant notion of “because of” would be asymmetric.

Further, even if the position in question—the adoption of a restricted Fixity of the Past Principle, compatibilism about God’s foreknowledge and human freedom, and incompatibilism about causal determinism and human freedom—is genuinely open, it in no way depends on what is distinctive of Molinism. That is, the signature features of Molinism involve the three moments of God’s omniscience—Natural Knowledge, Middle Knowledge (involving the so-called counterfactuals of freedom), and Free Knowledge. As far as I can see, these Molinist ideas do not play any role in motivating or defending the view in question, and, in particular, the view that some indisputably “hard” facts about the past are not fixed. As I stated previously, here Molinism would be playing no role in helping to stake out or defend the view as an answer to the Basic Argument for Incompatibilism about God’s omniscience and human freedom. The view in question may be open to a Molinist, but it is not a view that is in any way explained by Molinism *qua* Molinism. Thus, as earlier, the point is that Molinism in itself does not constitute an answer to the Basic Argument, whatever its other virtues may be.

CONCLUSION

The Basic Argument employs certain ingredients, such as the Principle of the Fixity of the Past, to get to the conclusion that God’s omniscience is *incompatible* with human freedom (in the sense of freedom to do otherwise). That is to say, the argument purports to establish that in *any* possible world in which God has foreknowledge of future human action, the relevant agent could not have done otherwise. Now there are various ways of addressing this argument by calling into question the various ingredients. Open Theism, Atemporalism, Ockhamism, and Multiple-Pasts Compatibilism do precisely this—they all pinpoint some putatively problematic assumption or “input” into the argument.

But Molinism is not on a par with these other approaches in identifying some specific problematic premise of the argument (and explaining why the premise is allegedly indefensible). Rather, Molinism assumes from the outset precisely the denial of the conclusion: it *assumes* that there exists a

possible world in which God knows in advance that some agent does *X* and is nevertheless free to do otherwise. So Molinism is an elegant model of Divine Providence, but it is *not* an answer to the Basic Argument; rather, it presupposes such an answer.²⁰

NOTES

1. John Martin Fischer (2008).
2. For a classic translation and commentary on Molina, see Alfred Freddoso (1988) and Luis de Molina (1988).
3. Freddoso (1988), 23.
4. It is, however, contentious whether simple foreknowledge is indeed providentially useless. David Hunt has argued against this position; see, for instance, David Hunt (2009).
5. Many people with whom I have discussed these matters have (at least initially) indicated that they think Molinism provides such an answer to the argument for incompatibilism. Robert Kane has explicitly stated this view in print:
The third solution to the foreknowledge problem originated with another later medieval thinker, the Spanish Jesuit philosopher and theologian Luis de Molina. . . . Like Ockham, Molina rejected the timeless solution to the foreknowledge problem of Boethius and Aquinas. But Molina sought a better answer than Ockham was able to give about *how* God can foreknow future free actions. To explain this, Molina introduced the notion of divine ‘middle knowledge’. (Kane, 2005, 157)
6. Fischer (2008).
7. It is important to see that the incompatibilist’s argument can be given in different forms; the form I employ here is based on my presentation in Fischer (1994), 88–90.
8. To be a bit more careful, there should be a “triple” indexation in the principle: indexation to a time of the having of the power, the time of the relevant action, and the world in which the power is possessed:
(FP**) An agent *S* has it in his power (in the sense relevant to moral responsibility) at (or just prior to) *t* in possible world *p* to do *X* at *t* only if there is a possible world *p** with the same past as that of *p* up to *t* in which *S* does *X* at *t*.
9. The argument is presented in Fischer (1994), 87–93, and it is based on Nelson Pike’s classic version of this ancient argument: Pike (1965), reprinted in Fischer (1992), 57–73.
10. Arthur Prior (1962) and (1968).
11. I’m assuming that God’s perfect goodness requires God to create free creatures. If one disagrees with this claim, one can adjust the text to include “. . . and he created free creatures.”
12. For discussions of Ockhamism, see Fischer (1992) and Fischer (1994), especially 111–130.
13. See Fischer (1994), especially 78–83.
14. I present the following argument in greater detail in Fischer (2008); the exposition of my argument in the text here (in the next few paragraphs) closely follows my presentation there. I am here deeply indebted to helpful and probing questions by Eleonore Stump on a previous version of the earlier paper; her questions helped me in how to present the argument in a sharper way.

15. Flint, personal correspondence, October 2007 through January 2008. I am very much indebted to Flint for his thoughtful and probing critique.
16. Flint, personal correspondence, January 2008.
17. For this analogy I am indebted to Neal Tognazzini.
18. A similar claim is advanced in Kevin Timpe (2007a).
19. Personal correspondence, September 21, 2007.
20. I am grateful to correspondence with Tom Flint and Michael Bergmann. Thanks also to very helpful comments by Neal Tognazzini and Kevin Timpe. I am honored to be included in this volume, and I wish to express both my admiration for Eleonore Stump's intellectual contributions and my gratitude for her generous support over the years.