

truth, then Y is part of middle knowledge. It is this truth that justifies the move I make here. For (3') clearly entails the conjunction of (3') and (3*), and since (3') itself is contingent, so is that conjunction.

28. For the reasoning that justifies this conditional, see note 27.

29. See note 27.

30. See note 27.

31. Note that the power being ascribed to CHN here is a power that the *assumed* CHN has, not simply a power that CHN *would have had* had it not been assumed.

32. Some might argue that the two cases are not parallel. Divine foreknowledge, they might say, does not *make* Cuthbert do anything, but divine assumption of a human nature *does* make that nature necessarily impeccable. Such an objection, though, simply trades on the ambiguity of "make". If we take "make" in the sense of "logically guarantee", then being assumed does make one impeccable. But, of course, in *this* sense of "make", foreknowledge too makes one act in a certain way. For example, God's foreknowing that Cuthbert will call Bert logically guarantees Cuthbert's making the call. On the other hand, if we take "make" in the sense of "causally guarantee", then there's no reason to think God's foreknowledge makes Cuthbert do anything. But, by the same token, there's no reason to think that being assumed makes one do anything either – at least, not so long as Molina is correct in claiming that an assumed nature might not receive all the gifts it is "owed".

33. The name, though widely used, is a bit misleading, since not all followers of Aquinas see themselves as advocating this account of divine providence.

34. For more on the infelicities associated with the Thomist view of providence, see my *Divine Providence*, pp. 84-94.

35. Earlier versions of a longer essay that included an ancestor of this paper were presented to the Center for Philosophy of Religion Discussion Group at the University of Notre Dame and at the Society of Christian Philosophers session at the APA Eastern Division Meetings in December, 1998. I am grateful to the members of the Center for their help with the paper, and to David Hunt, William Craig, William Hasker, Hugh McCann, and two anonymous *Faith and Philosophy* referees for stimulating and challenging comments and questions.

EXPLANATORY PRIORITY AND THE "COUNTERFACTUALS OF FREEDOM"

Wes Morrision

On a Molinist account of creation and providence, not only is there is a complete set of truths about what every possible person would freely do in any possible set of circumstances, but these conditional truths are part of the very explanation of our existence. Robert Adams has recently argued that the explanatory priority of these conditionals undermines libertarian freedom. In the present essay, I take a close look at Adams' argument and at the Molinist response of Thomas Flint. After showing that Flint's response is inadequate, I develop what I believe to be a more successful Molinist response to Adams' argument. Along the way, I seek to provide some insight into the nature of libertarian freedom and the proper interpretation of the much discussed "principle of alternate possibilities."

Is it the case that for each possible person there is a complete set of true conditionals about what that person would do in any possible situation in which that person exists and is free? The existence of such truths – commonly, if somewhat inaccurately¹, referred to nowadays as the "counterfactuals of freedom" – was the subject of heated debate in the sixteenth century. The Jesuit theologian, Luis de Molina, and his followers held that they were needed for an adequate account of providence and free will. The Molinists referred to God's knowledge of such conditionals as "middle knowledge," since it lies midway between his "free knowledge" of those contingent truths that depend entirely on his own free choices, and his "natural knowledge" of necessary truths that are independent of his will. Although the counterfactuals of freedom are contingent, they are like necessary truths in that they are completely independent of God's will, and God has no control over them.

According to Molinism, the counterfactuals of freedom are a bedrock feature of reality, and they play a crucial role in the explanation of the existence of human persons. God created *us* and made us free, we are to suppose, having taken fully into account his "middle knowledge" of what we would do with our freedom. Had God been better pleased with what some other possible set of free creatures would have done with *their* freedom, he would have created them instead. Had he been better pleased with what we would have done with our freedom in some other possible situation, he would have created us in that situation instead.

A great advantage of Molinism is that it allows those who hold it to combine a full-blooded belief in libertarian freedom with the view that all



human choices and actions take place in accordance with a detailed divine plan. In the Molinist world, there is no such thing as brute chance, and Providence rules all. It rules – not by *compelling* obedience, but by taking into account what it knows about what every possible person *would* freely do in any possible set of circumstances.

But are they really counterfactuals of freedom?

To a number of philosophers, it has seemed that this entire picture is logically incoherent – that the truths about the behavior of possible persons under various possible circumstances could not be genuine counterfactuals of *freedom*. For surely, if I am free to refrain from doing an act, then it must not be the case that my so refraining has already been precluded by a set of conditions that are part of the reason why I exist. But that is exactly how it would be if the Molinist explanation were true. God created us at least partly because he knew that we would make these choices and not others.

It is difficult to get the argument just right, however, and Molinists have shown considerable ingenuity in dodging the bullet. In *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account*,² Thomas Flint devotes an entire chapter to Hasker's version of the objection³, and another to that of Robert Adams⁴. Much can be learned from a consideration of these arguments. In the present essay, I shall take a close look at Adams' version of the objection and at Flint's reply. I shall try to show that Flint's response is not completely successful, but I shall then try to develop a more adequate Molinist response to the objection. Along the way, I hope to provide some insight into the nature of libertarian freedom and the proper interpretation of the much discussed "principle of alternate possibilities."

Adams vs. Flint

Adams begins by trying to show that Molinism entails that the truth of one's counterfactuals of freedom is "explanatorily prior" to all one's choices and actions. He summarizes this part of the argument as follows.

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

Adams then claims that

- (SI) If I freely do A in C, no truth that is strictly inconsistent with my refraining from A in C is explanatorily prior to my choosing and acting as I do in C.⁶

Given (5) and (SI), Adams thinks it follows that, for any act A and conditions C, I do not *freely* do A in C. For suppose that I do A in C. According to Molinism, there is a true counterfactual of freedom (one taken fully into account by God when he decided what and whom to create) saying that if I were in C I would do A. This counterfactual is therefore *explanatorily prior* to my doing A in C (from 5 above). It is also *strictly inconsistent* with my refraining from doing A in C. So (by SI) it follows that I do not do A freely in C.

Evidently, the key notion here is that of "explanatory priority." Adams does not offer an analysis of this concept, as he thinks he is merely taking over the Molinist's notion of explanatory priority. This leaves an opening for the Molinist, one that Flint is quick to exploit. The main thrust of Flint's response to Adams can be summarized as follows.

The kind of "explanatory priority" that is at issue isn't "explanatory priority in general," but rather "a specific kind of explanatory priority" – viz., "something's being explanatorily prior to someone's choosing and acting."⁷ The most natural ways of understanding the kind of priority⁸ involved in Molinism, Flint thinks, are these:

- (A) x is explanatorily prior to my choices and actions \equiv x is true, and there is no choice or action within my power that would cause it to be the case that x is false.
- (B) x is explanatorily prior to my choices and actions \equiv x is true, and there is no choice or action within my power such that, were I so to choose or so to act, x would be false.

Flint first argues that (A) is of no use to Adams, on the ground that no one who is "orthodox" with respect to God's complete and infallible foreknowledge should accept (SI) when explanatory priority is interpreted in line with (A). Flint thinks that no one has *causal* power over the past. Consequently, no one has the power to *cause* God's past knowledge to be other than it was. It follows that even straight divine foreknowledge (without middle knowledge) is explanatorily prior to one's choices and actions in the sense defined by (A). If, therefore, (SI) were accepted, an Adams-style argument would quickly show that divine foreknowledge (with or without middle knowledge) is incompatible with human freedom.⁹

Flint thinks (B) is no better from Adams' point of view, since it casts doubt on premise (4) of Adams' argument. When explanatory priority is interpreted in accordance with (B), Flint thinks there is no reason why a Molinist should grant that it is a transitive relation. To see why, let T stand for the true counterfactuals of freedom, D for God's decision about what to create in light of T, and A for some action performed by one of God's

human creatures. Then, Flint thinks, the claim that the counterfactuals of freedom are *explanatorily prior* to God's decision amounts to this.

- (i) $(D \rightarrow T) \ \& \ (\sim D \rightarrow T)$ [Where \rightarrow is the arrow of counterfactual implication.]

The claim that God's decision is *explanatorily prior* to the doing of A amounts to this.

- (ii) $(A \rightarrow D) \ \& \ (\sim A \rightarrow D)$

And the claim that the counterfactuals of freedom are *explanatorily prior* to the action in question amounts to this.

- (iii) $(A \rightarrow T) \ \& \ (\sim A \rightarrow T)$

If explanatory priority were transitive, Flint says that we would be able to derive (iii) from (i) and (ii). But Flint thinks we cannot do this. Since counterfactual implication is not in general transitive, neither conjunct of (iii) follows from (i) and (ii). This does not matter in the case of the left-hand conjunct, since $(A \rightarrow T)$ is obviously true. But Flint thinks we are left without any reason to believe the right-hand conjunct of (iii).

Let me try to put all of this a bit more intuitively. Interpreted in accordance with (B), the heart of Adams' argument goes like this:

- (B1) There is nothing God can do such that, were he to do it, any of the counterfactuals of freedom would be false. (In this sense, they are explanatorily prior to any decision God might make.)
- (B2) There is nothing we can do such that, were we to do it, God would not have acted as he did in creation. (In this sense, God's creative act is explanatorily prior to our choices and actions.)

Since Adams thinks that explanatory priority is a transitive relation, he thinks it follows that:

- (B3) There is nothing we can do such that were we to do it, any of the counterfactuals of freedom would be false. (In this sense, the counterfactuals of freedom are explanatorily prior to our choices and actions.)

A Molinist must deny (B3). For consider. If I freely do A in C, then (say the Molinists) the counterfactual of freedom, $C \rightarrow A$ must have been true of me. If I had not done A in C, $C \rightarrow \sim A$ would have been true of me instead. Since I did A freely, I must have been free not to do A — in which case, I must have been free to do something such that, had I done it, $C \rightarrow \sim A$, and not $C \rightarrow A$, would have been true of me. It follows that I am free to do something such that the counterfactual of freedom that is in fact true of me

$(C \rightarrow A)$ would instead have been false. This does not mean that I can *cause* it to have been false, but it does mean that I have what Flint calls "counterfactual power" over my counterfactuals of freedom.

So where does Adams's argument go wrong? On Molinism (B1) is true. What about (B2)? A Molinist might deny (B2), arguing that we have "counterfactual power" over (some of) God's creative decisions. But there is another option. Since the inference from (B1) and (B2) to (B3) is not *formally* valid, the Molinist does not *have* to deny (B2). He can instead claim that explanatory priority is not, on the account offered by (B), a transitive relation, in which case (B3) is not entailed by (B1) and (B2). This, as we have seen, is the line that Flint takes.

Explanatory priority

We seem to have arrived at an impasse. The anti-Molinist says that (B)-type explanatory priority is a transitive relation and that (B1) and (B2) entail (B3). The Molinist replies that — *on Molinism* — (B1) and (B2) do not entail (B3), because (B)-type explanatory priority is *not* a transitive relation. But before letting it go at that, let's take another look at the concept of explanatory priority. Do either of Flint's formulations succeed in capturing this key notion?

I think the answer to this question is no. Whatever explanatory priority is, it must surely have something to do with *explanation*. A true proposition P is not explanatorily prior to a true proposition Q unless P is in some way involved in the explanation of Q — involved, that is, in the answer to the question, "Why is it that Q?" None of Flint's formulations satisfy this simple requirement. Suppose, for example, that it is a fact (unbeknownst to us) that:

- (P) There are exactly ten boulders on the moon nearest to Jupiter, each of which weighs exactly 1.333 tons.

Plainly, we have neither causal nor counterfactual power over (P). There is nothing we can do that will cause (P) to have been false, and nothing we can do or decide such that were we to do or decide it (P) would have been false. So on either of Flint's analyses, (P) is "explanatorily prior" to our choices and actions. But it would be quite a stretch to insist that (P) is in any way involved in the *explanation* of our choices and actions.

Flint's mistake occurs right at the beginning of his discussion, when he writes:

Note first of all that the concept that is needed for Adams' argument isn't explanatory priority in general, but a specific kind of explanatory priority— something's being explanatorily prior to someone's choosing and acting. It is this kind of explanatory priority, I think, that we need most to examine.¹⁰

Adams' argument does indeed turn on the claim that the counterfactuals of freedom are "explanatorily prior" to "someone's choosing and act-

ing." But I see no reason to distinguish a different sense of explanatory priority for each different *explanandum*. The *relation* of explanatory priority may be the same for many different *explananda*.

Flint offers the following defense of his approach.

And I say this not only because it is the kind of explanatory priority that is employed in Adams' argument, and thus the only kind of explanatory priority that Adams really needs, but also because it is the principal kind of priority that the Molinist needs to discriminate between middle knowledge and free knowledge. In saying that middle knowledge is distinct from and prior to free knowledge, the Molinist means to say that the former is independent of God's will, while the latter is not. For any element of his free knowledge, there were actions within God's power which would have led to that proposition's being false. No element of his middle knowledge is thus dependent upon his action; what he knows by middle knowledge are facts about which he can do nothing.¹¹

It is certainly true that Molinists think that the truth of the counterfactuals of freedom is fixed independently of God's will. But that makes them *explanatorily* prior only because his knowledge of those truths is part of the *explanation* of his decision about what to create. The counterfactuals of freedom are explanatorily prior to God's creative will because they are a critical element in the story that *explains why* God chose to (weakly) actualize *this* world rather than any other possible one.

In the following passage, Flint acknowledges that the priority we are interested in here is priority *in the order of explanation*.

Explanatory priority for Adams, then, is supposed to be priority in the order of explanation, and priority in this sense has to do with what is and isn't "data that God takes into account"—that is, with facts of which he is aware but over which he has no control.¹²

This is exactly right. Nevertheless, Flint seeks to refute Adams' argument by considering a series of accounts of "explanatory priority" that have nothing directly to do with the order of *explanation*. It is hardly surprising that none of them serves the needs of Adams' argument.

I do not have an especially deep or illuminating analysis of explanatory priority to offer. Nevertheless, I think we can make some progress in getting the issue properly focussed. As a start, we might try something like this.

(EP) P is *explanatorily prior* to Q \equiv Q is not self-explanatory; and P is part of the explanation of Q.

This is obviously correct, as far as it goes. Unless a thing is self-explanatory (as God is sometimes supposed to be), the *explanans* explains the *explanandum*, and not the other way around. In that sense, it is "prior" to the *explanandum*. But what is an explanation? Which of the various senses of the word "explanation" do we have in mind here?

Suppose we are interested in finding the explanation of an event E. Then what we want to find, I suggest, is a set of conditions, $c_1..c_n..$, such that (i) $c_1..c_n..$ are not simply a redescription of E; and such that (ii) $c_1..c_n..$ answer the question, "Why did E occur?" The conditions $c_1..c_n..$ of a good explanation need not be *causally sufficient* for the occurrence of E. But it must at least be the case that they *influenced* the occurrence of E, making it more probable – all other things being equal – that E would occur.¹³

For example, an explanation of a high tide will provide a causally sufficient explanation. The moon, the water, and the rest of the earth, and their positions relative to one another, as well as the inverse square law of attraction – all will play their parts in the explanation. Given these conditions, the tide *must* be high. In contrast to this, an explanation of the disintegration of a uranium atom at a particular time will not be causally sufficient for its *explanandum*. The elements of the explanation will include the internal state of the atom prior to its disintegration, as well as statistical laws about the frequency with which atoms in that state behave in certain ways. Similarly, a satisfactory explanation of a murder need not delineate causally sufficient conditions. But it will say what *influenced* the murderer's behavior.

In all such cases, the elements of the explanation are distinct from the event explained. They are also "prior" to the event in the sense that, however indeterministically, it flows from them, and not the other way around. Given this (admittedly rough) understanding of explanation and explanatory priority, the main premise of Adams' argument – (SI) – is quite plausible. If I do an act A and my refraining from doing A is strictly inconsistent with some part of the explanation of my doing A, then surely I cannot be free to refrain from doing it. To put it differently – if the explanation of an act is so good that it logically entails that I do A, then no libertarian should think I am free to refrain from doing A.

So far, so good. But is explanatory priority in the sense of (EP) a transitive relation? It is not at all clear that it is. Suppose a long and tender kiss was a key factor in getting my parents into bed the day I was conceived. Then perhaps that kiss is part of the explanation of my existence. Let us suppose (at least for the sake of argument) that my existence is part of the explanation of my writing this paper. Does it follow that my parents' kiss is part of the explanation of my writing this paper? Surely that would be a bit of a stretch?

However, some philosophers may think my parents' kiss is part of the *total* explanation of my writing this paper, where a *total* explanation includes everything that contributes – however indirectly – to the explanation of my act. If such a concept is defensible, then perhaps (EP) could be replaced by the following principle:

(EP*) P is *explanatorily prior* to Q \equiv Q is not self-explanatory; and P is part of the *total* explanation of Q.

Or perhaps better:

(EP**) P is explanatorily prior to Q \equiv Q is not self-explanatory; and either (i) P contributes directly to the explanation of Q, or (ii) P

contributes directly to something that does contribute directly to the explanation of [...] Q.

So understood, explanatory priority is clearly a transitive relation; in which case (1) – (5) of Adams' argument is impeccable. Clearly, the counterfactuals of freedom are *part* of the *total* explanation of our existence, and our existence is *part* of the *total* explanation of our choices and actions. So the counterfactuals of freedom must be *part* of the total explanation of our choices and actions.

But now we have to ask whether, on this revised account of explanatory priority, (SI) is true. Is it the case that if refraining from doing an act A is strictly inconsistent with something that directly or indirectly contributes to the total explanation of my decision, then I am not free to refrain from doing A? If we can justify an affirmative answer, then Adams' argument will have succeeded in refuting Molinism.

Recasting the issue

So what about (SI)? Can we choose and act in ways that are incompatible with truths that are "explanatorily prior" (in the sense just defined) to our decisions and our actions? Is it within our power to perform actions such that were we to perform them those truths would not have been true? Do we, to borrow Flint's expression, have "counterfactual power" over them?

In trying to answer this question, I think it may be helpful to recast the issue in the following way. Anyone – Molinist or not – would presumably agree that one's freedom is confined within limits imposed by the situation in which one finds oneself. If I had a different kind of body, I might have been able to run a marathon. But I don't, and I can't. If I had had a different sort of mind, I might have been able to win the Nobel Prize for chemistry. But I don't, and I can't. If I had the right friends, I might have been able to visit the private section of the White House. But I don't, and (as things are now) I can't. More generally, if my situation had been different, the range of my possibilities might have been different. But my situation is as it is, and my possibilities are as they are, and it would be absurd to say that I have "counterfactual power" over those aspects of my situation which genuinely limit my possibilities.

One obvious way to conceptualize this is to say that there is a set of conditions, C, such that it is not within my power to perform actions that are inconsistent with those conditions. The scope of what I do have the power to do – of my "possibilities," so to speak – is defined relative to C. To say that it is within one's power to do or refrain from doing something is to say that one's doing so is not logically incompatible with (not "strictly inconsistent with") C.

But what is the relevant set of conditions? Uncontroversial examples would be the laws of nature, the physical environment in which I find myself, the kind of mind and body I have, and a whole range of more particular facts about me – where I was born and grew up, the people I know, the experiences I have had. All of these contribute to making some things possible for me, and others impossible. These are clear examples of condi-

tions over which I do *not* have "counterfactual power."

Other examples are more controversial. Will there be a seafight tomorrow? Suppose it is – now – a fact that there will be. Does *that* fact belong to the set of conditions that limit the possibilities of the admiral of the fleet? Is a seafight therefore unavoidable? A few philosophers have thought that the only alternative to logical fatalism is to say that there are truth value gaps with regard to future contingents. But most philosophers who think about these matters disagree. They see no problem in asserting both that one will in fact do something and that it is within one's power to refrain from doing so. For them, these "facts" about future free actions do not belong to the freedom-limiting set of conditions, C.

But what, exactly, are the boundaries of C? This is where all the important disagreements lie. Libertarians would agree that causes and causal laws go in. But what about the past? Does the relevant set of conditions include all of the past? Or only some of it? Are there "soft facts" about the past that make no difference to what we can do? "Facts" over which we do have "counterfactual power?" If so, is God's foreknowledge a "soft" fact? Or does it properly belong to the set of facts that limit the range of our freedom?

The present issue, of course, does not concern simple foreknowledge, but rather God's middle knowledge of what every possible person would do if created free in any possible situation. Do the true counterfactuals of freedom properly belong to the set of conditions that limits our freedom?

Adams' argument can be viewed as an attempt to defend an affirmative answer to this question. I read Adams as saying something like this. "Not only are the objects of God's middle knowledge fixed independently of our existence, but they play an important role in the story that *explains why we exist at all*. Surely that is enough to make them part of the body of fact that determines what I can and cannot do! If I exist at least partly *because* of these conditions, then how can it be the case that I have the power to act in ways that are incompatible with them?"

Let's try to put this a bit more precisely. Again, let C be the freedom limiting set of conditions. Then we have the following anti-Molinist argument.

1. It is not within my power to perform (or refrain from performing) any act that is strictly inconsistent with C.
2. C includes every fact that contributes (directly or indirectly) to the explanation of my existence.
3. The true counterfactuals of freedom contribute (at least indirectly) to the explanation of my existence.
4. Therefore, it is not within my power to perform (or refrain from performing) any act that is strictly inconsistent with the true counterfactuals of freedom.
5. For any concrete situation C, and set of alternatives, A and $\sim A$, either $C \rightarrow A$ or $C \rightarrow \sim A$ is among the true counterfactuals of freedom that contribute to the explanation of my existence.

6. So whether I do A or \sim A, the opposite choice is strictly inconsistent with the true counterfactuals of freedom.
7. Therefore, whether I do A or \sim A, it is not in my power to do the opposite.

One merit of this argument is that it makes it clear precisely why Molinism seems problematic to many philosophers who do not have a similar problem with arguments for the incompatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom. God's foreknowledge does not contribute to the explanation of my existence, whereas God's middle knowledge of what we would all do if created does so contribute. It isn't a direct *causal* contribution, to be sure. The counterfactuals of freedom are not *causal laws*, and God's middle knowledge of them is not causally sufficient for his decision to create us. Nevertheless, the Molinist holds that God creates us at least partly *because* of what he knows we would do if created, and that is what makes premise 3 true.

Another merit of this way of putting the argument is that it completely sidesteps the controversy about whether or not explanatory priority is a transitive relation. What matters to the argument is whether the counterfactuals of freedom contribute (however indirectly) to the explanation of our existence. If they do, then they must belong to the freedom limiting set of conditions, C, and the game is over.

A way out for Molinists

Or is it? What about premise 2? Clearly we should include in C all those conditions that make a causal contribution to the explanation of our existence. But what about conditions making the sort of contribution Molinists have in mind when they speak of the role played by middle knowledge in creation? Is simply being among God's reasons for creating us sufficient for membership in C?

This is not an easy question to answer, and equally smart and well-informed philosophers seem to have incompatible intuitions. On the one hand, it is hard to believe that anyone has the power – even the “counterfactual” power – to act in ways that are incompatible with any part of the explanation of one's existence. On the other hand, Molinists are right to point out that the counterfactuals of freedom are not laws that govern our behavior, and that on their view nothing causes us to act as we do. Is this enough to get the Molinist off the hook?

I believe there is a bit of logical space for the Molinist to occupy. Whether we think it is big enough depends, I think, on our analysis of libertarian freedom. I conclude this paper by tracing the outlines of an analysis that would give the Molinist what he wants.

Libertarians typically say two things about the concept of a free action.

- (I) Nothing (else) caused the agent to act as he did.

- (II) Exactly as things were at the time of action, the agent could have refrained from doing the act.

Libertarians have often defended (I) by trying to derive it from (II). If conditions apart from the agent were sufficient to cause him to act as he does, then the agent could not do otherwise, and (II) is false. But recently, there has been a move in the direction of seeing (I) as a fundamental principle standing on its own independently of (II). Indeed, some libertarians are willing to entertain the possibility that Frankfurt-style counterexamples refute (II).

It will be recalled that Frankfurt's original counterexample went something like this. Black wants Jones to murder Green. Black is monitoring the state of Jones's brain and will intervene if Jones shows any sign of not deciding “on his own” to murder Green. As it happens, Jones murders Green without any intervention from Black. It seems that Jones could not have done otherwise (had he shown any sign of not doing so, Black would have intervened). And yet, intuitively, it seems that Jones is responsible for murdering Green. Precisely because he did it “on his own,” we think he acted *freely*.

However, as incompatibilists have often pointed out, even if Jones was unable to avoid murdering Green, the fact remains that he was able to avoid doing it *on his own*, and thus to avoid doing it *freely*. So it seems that a modified version of principle (II) might still be true of any free action.

- (II*) Exactly as things were at the time of action, the agent could have refrained from *freely* doing the act.

It is not easy to see how to construct a Frankfurt-style counterexample to (II*). If Black intervenes, he can make Jones do the deed, but he cannot make him do it *freely*. Or so it would seem.

But what if Black had middle knowledge? And what if Jones's counterfactuals of freedom were such that he *would* freely murder Green in a variety of different situations? Black would then not need to monitor Jones's brain. Nor would he need to intervene in the crude way that prevents Jones from doing the act “on his own.” No, all Black would have to do is make sure that Green is never in any of those situations in which Black knows that Jones will not *freely* do the deed. Then, since Jones does not have the power to put himself in any *other* situation, it might seem that he cannot avoid *freely* doing the act, contrary to (II*).

Do we now have a counterexample to (II*)? That depends on whether we think that the truths about what Jones would do in different situations belong to the freedom limiting set of conditions, C. If they do, then Jones could not have freely refrained from doing the act and we have a clear counterexample to (II*). Otherwise, we do not.

Surprisingly enough, I think a Molinist might be able to live with an affirmative answer to this question. He might argue that neither (II) nor (II*) is an absolute requirement for freedom and responsibility, while insisting that freedom and responsibility are *not* compatible with *causal* determinism. For what is it that makes us think that Jones acts freely if not that

he acts *on his own* without interference from Black – or from any other cause apart from Jones himself? It is because condition (I) above is unaffected that we think Jones acts freely and is responsible for his act. Or so a libertarian with Molinist sympathies might say.

Libertarians who believe in agent causation may put the point in the following way. Even though Jones could not have avoided killing Green, he did the murder *freely* because *he* agent-caused it, and because nothing (else) caused him to agent-cause it. That is the fundamental requirement for libertarian freedom, a requirement that is – obviously enough – incompatible with any sort of causal determinism.

If this is right, then the proper response to our anti-Molinist argument is simply to point out that even if it succeeds in establishing that middle knowledge is incompatible with the possibility of doing otherwise, it fails to establish that no one ever acts *freely* in a strong libertarian sense. As long as the counterfactuals in virtue of which it is impossible for us to do otherwise are not *causal* laws, and as long as God does not *make* us act in accordance with them, they may still be genuine counterfactuals of freedom, and Molinism emerges from the battle unscathed.

Some Molinists may be satisfied with this solution to the problem, but I suspect that most will not want to give up on the alternative possibilities requirement. The conclusion of our anti-Molinist argument – “whether I do A or \sim A, it is not in my power to do the opposite” – will be unacceptable to them. They will want to insist that there must be *some* sense – a strongly incompatibilist sense – in which genuine freedom does require the “power to do the opposite.” They will therefore want to insist that we do not have a clear counterexample to (II*), on the ground that the facts about what a person *would* do in every possible situation do *not* belong to the freedom-limiting set of conditions, C.

Can we give a clear rationale for this position, however? Can the Molinist do more than claim that the anti-Molinist has yet to *prove* that the relevant subjunctive conditionals *do* belong to C? I think perhaps he can.

What matters to the freedom with which an act is performed, we have suggested, is how and by what the act is *caused*. But this needn't mean that freedom does not entail alternative possibilities. It's just that if it does entail alternative possibilities, those possibilities must be defined *in relation to the causal antecedents of the act*. This suggestion may be developed as follows.

What does it mean to say that “Jones could have chosen otherwise?” Not that Jones could have done otherwise, given *all* the facts about Jones's antecedents, since that set of conditions includes the truth of the proposition that Jones would *not* do otherwise. What it does mean is that Jones could have done otherwise, given all the conditions that (directly or indirectly) *causally influence* him – given all the conditions that play a *causal* role in the explanation of his behavior. Relative to *that* set of conditions, he can do A or refrain from doing A. For both A and \sim A are “strictly consistent” with this narrower set of conditions.

Different senses of “possibility” may thus be defined in terms of different sets of conditions. An act is “possible” in sense P_C if it is strictly consistent with a set of conditions C. Suppose that C includes the fact that I have

not bothered to learn Finnish. Then it is not *possible* for me to speak it. Now suppose that C does not include this fact, but does include my linguistic abilities. Relative to this narrower set of facts, it is possible for me to speak Finnish.¹⁴

The critical question, then, is this. Which kind of possibility is required for the kind of freedom presupposed by moral responsibility? And which facts should be included in the set of conditions in relation to which it is defined? Not all the facts. Where C is *all* the facts, nothing is P_C -possible other than what actually happens. So how, exactly, should we restrict membership in C?

From a Molinist point of view, it might make sense to impose the following restriction. The relevant conditions are those that (directly or indirectly) play a *causal* role in the explanation of our behavior. This has exactly the consequences the Molinist wants – viz., that causal determinism is, whereas middle knowledge is not, incompatible with freedom and responsibility. If causal determinism were true, only what we actually do would be strictly consistent with all the facts about our causal antecedents. But since the counterfactuals of freedom do not play a *causal* role in the explanation of our actions, and since God does not *cause* us to act in accordance with them, they do not belong to the relevant set of conditions, and do not rule out alternative possibilities – in the sense of “possibility” that matters to human freedom.

If this is right, then we have a clear rationale for rejecting premise (2) of our anti-Molinist argument. Granted that there is a freedom-restricting set of conditions, the Molinist can deny that the counterfactuals of freedom are included in it. Merely contributing (directly or indirectly) to the explanation of my existence is not sufficient for membership in C. And since the counterfactuals of freedom do not make a *causal* contribution, they are excluded.

Some Molinists will not be completely satisfied with this proposal, however. They will not want to deny that God's middle knowledge plays a *causal* role (albeit not a *sufficient* causal role) in the explanation of our behavior. Suppose, for example, that God's middle knowledge was involved in Christ's prediction that Peter would deny him three times. Could this not have been at least a necessary causal condition of Peter's subsequent behavior?¹⁵ It may not be too hard to tell a story on which it is, but the Molinist will not want, on that account, to say that the middle knowledge behind Christ's prediction belongs to the freedom-limiting set of conditions, C – since that would have the unwelcome consequence that Peter was not free to refrain from denying Christ.

So perhaps the Molinist will want to define C even more narrowly, so that it includes any condition (or set of conditions) that is causally *sufficient* for an act, but does not include conditions that are only causally *necessary* for it. That would still give us a strongly libertarian sense of “possibility” – one that would not be incompatible with Peter's having the power to refrain from denying Christ.

Conclusion

Clearly, further refinement of this proposal is needed. But I think we must at least be on the right track in suggesting that counterfactuals of free-

dom are not inimical to freedom because they do not play the right sort of *causal* role in the explanation of free actions.

Imagine a cousin of Molinism in which there is a complete set of true counterfactuals of freedom, but in which they play no role whatever in the *explanation* of our existence, our choices, or our actions. (Perhaps because God does not exist, or because he decides what to create on some altogether different basis.) Would the *bare truth* of a complete set of such conditionals have any tendency to show that we are not free to choose and act in ways that are "strictly inconsistent" with them?

I doubt it. After all, most of us believe that there is a complete body of truths about the future; but very few regard this as a reason for thinking that there is only one possible future. Most philosophers think we can avoid fatalism without the desperate expedient of postulating truth value gaps or denying the law of excluded middle. The consensus position is that the *bare truth* of propositions about the future is perfectly compatible with alternative possibilities.

Why should it be different for the counterfactuals of freedom? Why should their *bare truth* be any more inimical to freedom than is the antecedent truth of non-conditional predictions about what we will do? As far as I can see, it isn't.

Now back to Molinism proper. Why should the mere fact that God *knows* the true counterfactuals of freedom, and *takes them into account* in deciding what to do make any difference? As long as God does not *make* us act in accordance with his middle knowledge, it is very difficult to see how his decision process can interfere with our freedom of choice. If this is really all there is to the *explanatory priority* of the counterfactuals of freedom, then it is hard to see how it can be the difference that makes a difference.

When I began working on this topic, I expected to develop a successful Adams-style argument against Molinism. But as often happens when one thinks hard about a philosophical problem for a long time, I have had to change my mind. Unless Adams (or someone) can provide a convincing reason for including the counterfactuals of freedom in the set of conditions relative to which alternate possibilities are defined, our anti-Molinist argument must be deemed a failure. Explanatory priority will not do the trick.¹⁶

University of Colorado, Boulder

NOTES

1. Since many of these conditionals have contrary to fact antecedents.
2. Thomas Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).
3. William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 39-52.
4. Robert Adams, "An Anti-Molinist Argument," in James E. Tomberlin, ed, *Philosophical Perspectives*, vol. 5 (Atascadero, Calif.: Ridgeview, 1991), pp. 343-353.
5. Adams, p. 349.
6. Adams, p. 350. Note that '(SI)' is my label. In the Adams text, this prin-

ciple is step (12) of the argument.

7. Flint, p. 163.

8. In fairness to Flint, it should be noted that he is not himself especially enthusiastic about calling this *explanatory* priority, and only reluctantly uses Adams' terminology.

9. Flint, p. 165.

10. Flint, p. 163.

11. Flint, p. 163.

12. Flint, p. 163.

13. I do not propose this as an adequate *analysis* of the concept of explanation. I offer it merely as a partial description of the sort of thing that is typically involved in explanation – a description sufficient to pick out the notion of "explanation" that is involved in what Adams calls "explanatory priority."

14. The reader will notice that I have borrowed this example from David Lewis, "The Paradoxes of Time Travel," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 13 (1976), pp. 145-52.

15. I owe this example to Thomas Flint.

16. I wish to express my thanks to the editor and the referees of *Faith and Philosophy* for their very helpful comments and suggestions. I am especially grateful to Thomas Flint for straightening me out about several things.